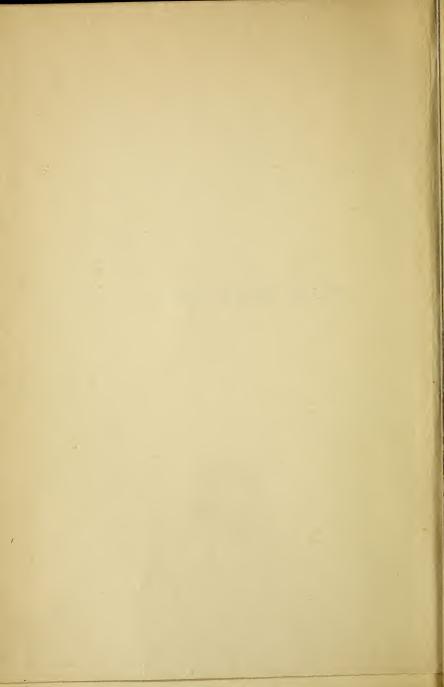


## THREE WOMEN AND I



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## THREE WOMEN AND I

I SHALL find this story difficult to tell, just because it will be so easily misunderstood. I have three lives; I am not able to express it otherwise. I cannot, to this day, determine in which of the three I was born, or to which my destiny leads me. But I know that I cannot feel at home, so to speak, in more than one at a time. This is no conventional prejudice; none can affirm it better than I.

At the time the story begins I was still in an Institution for the Blind. If I am to remain true to facts, I must not care how improbable they sound. Immediately, nearly on the same day, three other lives began to overlap mine. I am not blameless if there was concealment of the one from the other; but to act quite honourably

would have been asking too much from a

youth of eighteen years.

Edith Kall, who had procured our tickets for the opera, was a sister of Peter, a fellow-pupil who was to go with us. I did not care for him much, but circumstances forced us to be almost constantly together.

He studied music, as I did, but was infinitely more diligent, and in a certain sense more gifted. He was, however, stupid and—how shall I express it?—wooden.

It was Carmen they were performing. I should have come with equal joy to any other opera, for to me it was an enormous and exciting adventure. I do not believe that for the eight years I had lived in that house I had ever till that moment left it, except on the two or three days of our annual summer excursions; and then in company with all the other pupils and in charge of masters. I knew the outer world only through the reports of comrades who went home for their holidays. My experience of the municipal alms-house in which

I had spent the repressed and darkened years of my childhood did not count.

To Peter Kall fell the task of asking permission from the Governor. Had it been I who approached him he would have inquired how I proposed to get money for the ticket. He would not have believed me had I said it was a gift from Peter. I should not have dared to tell him the truth.

For me the marvels of the evening began with the medley of voices and steps and traffic in the street, with the hum of the tramways under my feet, and with the swelling murmur of the thrilled, expectant audience in the theatre. The wild crash and fiery rhythm of the orchestra fascinated me like an infernal dance of maniacs.

Edith seized my arm in alarm. I jumped on my seat, I waved my body backwards and forwards or nodded my head gently smiling. I did not guess the embarrassment I caused the girl on account of the amusement or annoyance of our neighbours.

How soon I was to become only too sensitive to the smallest awkwardness in my situation! But that evening I was still unself-conscious.

If the orchestra paused I lost my breath; my waiting limbs stiffened as in a vice. It tortured me when the lower tones of the men or the high, floating voices of the women interfered with the instruments.

With distorted face and back all doubled up, I hit my knees and my legs wildly and impatiently against one another or against the seat in front. Especially when Micaela sang. Her small, rounded birdlike voice seemed to me the most ethereal and complete achievement in tone beauty that the human throat was capable of producing. The tears stung my eyes and cheeks when her gentle notes soared sweet and clear above the lulled storm of sound. Her song about mother and home especially went to my heart, since these artless, sentimental primitive things were unknown to me, or at most were shadows in the shifting dream of my incoherent, wistful childhood.

'Would you like to know the singer?' Edith asked me afterwards when the applause was drowning the last notes. She smiled a little but was not joking.

I did not waste a moment in asking which singer she meant. I almost shivered for joy, and I should have appreciated her dear kind offer more fully had I understood the trouble and anxiety it involved to lead two men both taller and stronger than herself with her soft arms through the crowd in the cloak-room and on the stairs.

'The prima donna's sister is an acquaintance of mine,' said Edith. 'She will take us to her dressing-room.'

The room was small. It smelt of flowers and grease paint. As we entered, a dry, peremptory, even sharp voice, which assuredly had nothing in common with those singing tones, asked an impatient question.

The faint, timid voice of a girl answered. 'Say something nice,' Edith whispered to me.

But cool fingers suddenly touched my

hand, and a look, searching and astonished, fell on my face and lingered there. (How strange it is that when I am near to people I am perfectly aware not only of their looking at me, even when they are not speaking to me, but also of their expression as well.)

For quite a little while nobody said a word. Then the first voice inquired—not of me, but of Edith—some details of my circumstances and my future plans.

Did she then already know something about me?

Edith eagerly gave her a minute account. I felt slightly ashamed that I knew nothing of my parents and was only to be a pianotuner.

'Have you time to-morrow?' asked the lady.

Time? It seemed strange to be asked such a question. Every hour of the day had its occupation regulated for me.

'Will you come to my house and tune my piano?' she asked, as if there was nothing remarkable in her doing so. I answered 'Yes' at once; but I had no notion how I should manage to get leave.

She then addressed a few words to Peter, but I knew that her eyes still lingered on me.

He began to talk nonsense. It was his form of shyness. Clearing his throat he told her, in long-winded and important fashion, that her singing had pleased him very much, and it was certain she would please the public abroad. His snuffling speech came slowly and emphatically.

I only hope she did not hear him; for, while he was speaking, she asked me if my name had really been known, or if some one in the alms-house had just invented one for me.

I started. I must have shown very plainly that this question had never been put to me before. I really do not know why I was so excited, but I could not answer a syllable.

Then it happened. She caught hold of my hair, bent my head back, gave a strange

laugh and kissed me on the lips, doing this before all who were standing there. She would not let me go. Her mouth was moist and warm and trembling. I somehow noticed that she was weeping silently.

'She is mad,' said Edith when we got outside, 'but she is kindness itself. And not merely for the moment. I knew that she had only to see you to use all her influence for you, as she would for a brother. She teaches in the best families. She will introduce you everywhere, and you will never need to worry about clients.'

Thus did Edith sum up the matter. To each his own point of view. She was so glad at the success of this cleverly managed introduction that she embraced me as if some piece of good luck had befallen herself, and as if I had by that means acquired some special merit. But she immediately began a long conversation with an acquaintance who had been waiting for us at the door of the theatre. 'The singer, when you are near her,' she said, 'is not by any means so ugly and insignificant as she

appears to be on the stage. She evidently does not understand the art of making-up. She has, accordingly, to depend too much on her voice, and that is not very powerful. If she had not such a following in society——'

Do people really believe that it is not wrong to say hard things of others behind their backs? Can we be so certain that they do not feel them? Surely such things are bound to reach them in some way and at some time!

I could not walk with the others. A happy thought came to me. They must on no account accompany me, I said, all the way to the Institution. Why should they walk that long road twice over in one night, when Peter had leave to stay at home till Sunday morning? They need only put me into a tramcar.

I assured them that I had taken the precaution, on my way out, to count the number of steps from the gate of the Institution to the terminus, and that in any case I knew the street very well.

Edith hesitated, but when I pretended to be greatly offended, she yielded. True, it was against the grain, and she was still hesitating when she recommended me to the care of the conductor, asking him to help me when I got out.

Like a captive released I took my seat among strangers in the clattering, buzzing tramcar, and was free to recall the round, delicate, birdlike tones of the singer. I evaded the torturing question, I refused to ask myself whether the contrast with her sharp, rough voice when speaking denoted a kind of split, a fissure in her character, a two-fold nature. Her hand was certainly hard and large, almost like a man's-but no, no! I said her name aloud: Marina Epare! It was like a song. It was her mother's maiden name.

I tapped on my knees the piano chords

of the duet with José. . . .

The tramcar thundered more rapidly through the streets of the suburb. no notion what I should do when I got out. I had hardly even a rough idea in which direction the Institution lay. How could Edith guess that I should lie so flippantly in such a matter?

But I did not worry. Perhaps I should meet somebody. True, it was late, and out here where the new suburban streets were not even completed, there was little life at night. But the magical genie of this evening would continue to look after me. Besides, one must leave a little play to Providence.

\* \* \* \* \*

Certainly I had imagined things would happen more easily and pleasantly. The empty tramcar rolled back into the town, and I seemed cut off thus, for a while, from the realm of sound.

As I did not stand still anxiously waiting for help I could at least hear my own footsteps echoing from the stones into the silence. And from the reverberation of sound I could feel distinctly the presence of houses. I was not caring much if I did go in the wrong direction. In any case I could not reach my destination without a second person to help me, and whether I found that person a little nearer or farther from the Institution made no difference.

But it was strange. I met no one. True, I heard the sound of steps—not mine! I stopped in order to exclude all possibility of a mistake—but how could I call so far across the street asking some one to accompany me?

A door was flung open; out rushed the smell of beer and the sound of wild merriment. A few steps would bring me to the spot. I could distinctly hear the muffled noise of fiddles and a third-rate piano being thumped behind the closed door.

I put my hand out irresolutely—and then found myself grasping the latch and standing inside. I was bound to get some information here.

Somebody thundered: 'Get out of the way!' I did not know which way to go. Dancing was going on within the room.

And then a girl's small, firm hand seized and guided me. I began immediately to explain my situation, but she did not hear me; there was too much noise. She led me into a side room.

'Who is this new lover that Milka has picked up?' a high, tremulous voice called out. 'Doctor, are you not jealous?'

The only answer was a burst of goodhumoured laughter from some people sitting round a table.

The narrow room with so few persons in it seemed to be almost refined in its stillness and remoteness after the noise of the adjoining dancing-hall.

Milka, paying no attention to the talk, pushed a seat under me, and, asking me what I would like to drink, immediately left the room.

The conversation went on over my head. I did not dare to ask for what I really wanted in this place where every one seemed to make fun of the slightest incident. I was also very perturbed as I did not know if my whole available cash was sufficient to

pay for the glass of beer that stood before me. I did not dare to drink it for fear they should bring me a second glass when the first one was empty.

The talk alarmed and yet fascinated me. There was such an unconcerned fearlessness in the coarse jokes. This was new to me coming as I did from a life constantly surrounded by teachers and supervisors. Nearly all the expressions would have been unintelligible to me, if the doctor, who seemed to have taken me in hand, had not explained them.

The relations between us had already on that evening assumed a special character. At first, like the others, he merely addressed a few compassionate or inquisitive words in the direction of my table; but afterwards, in passing it, he stopped to look at my eyes. He asked if an operation had never been advised, if I had not been examined in a hospital, and who was the doctor in attendance at our Institution. He also put the question which I so much disliked because I had no answer to it—'When had "it"

happened?' Once more he turned up my eyelids, and bent quite close over me. At last I became impatient, and drew my head away.

He laughed and tried to cheer me up. Sitting down beside me he told me the story of each one in the company. By this time they were seated at a neighbouring table, so engrossed in a game of some kind in which coins were tossed, that they paid no attention to us. In his voice, insinuating and smooth as butter, and in his hasty, stammering utterance, a foreign, possibly a Polish accent was discernible.

Sometimes we were interrupted by a dispute at the gaming-table.

Suddenly he jumped up and ordered Milka in a commanding tone to come out of the dancing-hall. Two of the company, one of them with a majestic bass voice, and the other with a shrill tenor, had made her old grandfather drunk, and were now forcing him to pay the bill for them all. He was making bitter lamentations about

his poverty, and despairingly repudiating all the private savings they attributed to him.

'You've finished here, haven't you?' the doctor imperiously asked Milka. He lived at her house. She seemed to be in awe of him; or she may simply have felt humble and shy before his great learning. She asked him to accompany her grandfather, as she herself had to go on an errand. And then she whispered to me softly in passing that her way home lay in the direction of the Institution, and perhaps I might like to come with her.

There was no divination in her recognition of me as a pupil of the Institution. I was wearing the high-cut uniform that could be seen every day in that neighbourhood.

When we were outside I soon noticed that she was not on any errand. She apologized for not having been able to accompany me home sooner; she had not been free. She was paid as extra waitress for these particular hours. She held me

carefully by the arm as if I were more brittle than other people.

I was deeply moved, not only by the awkward kindness of the rough girl, but also by the doctor's astonishing parting words. He had spoken of a quite recent operation that had had the most astonishing success. 'I myself,' he added, 'am the assistant of the celebrated professor who has discovered the process, and I should like to operate on you, if you are willing to allow me. It goes without saying that I shall ask no fee. I should be a poor sort of doctor if my chief aim was not to help others. Besides, the success of a novel operation of this kind means, in every case, an addition to scientific knowledge.'

me . . .'—the words still echoed. They seemed to imply that the operation would be a favour on my part, that it was quite conceivable that I should not condescend to it. No one had spoken to me like this before. I trembled with fear and joy. I almost shrank from the tumult of joyful

possibilities and from the new life that was

opening before me.

Then Milka suddenly stammered: 'But he isn't actually a doctor yet. He has a hard job to earn each bite. It's slow work getting to the top.' She did not want to make me distrustful; but it worried her to leave me under any misunderstanding. Her speech was a strange mixture of harsh, awkward Czech, German, and Viennese dialects, that made her seem a primitive and hardy creature.

She asked me how I managed to be out alone at so late an hour. I began to tell her about the opera, especially about the one outstanding singer. I wanted to describe her wonderful voice and her moving interpretation, but I did not get far. I had a boyish sensation of choking; my temples throbbed, and my face was distorted. If that doctor had been right, and I was soon to be able to see everything—the opera and the singer! . . . I could not contain myself. I burst out weeping. I was ashamed.

We stood still. She put her arms round me, but I only wept more bitterly and drew wildly away.

The more my sobs shook me the closer and more firmly she clung to me. She could not help herself. She could not bear to see me weep. She made an effort to comfort me by kind, helpless, motherly sounds, and by the contact of her firm, warm body, with its youthful, distinctly outlined limbs—but my senseless agitation grew more and more desperate.

Then the saving thought occurred to her. She reminded me that we had to reach our destination, and that, as we were near the Institution, we might meet one of the inmates. Then as we walked on she began to speak of other things. The doctor, she said, was wonderful; he could do anything you wanted. Only he could not manage the book learning—the useless things needed for examinations. But one day he would be a great man, and then nobody would bother any more about examinations. He would suddenly become famous, and

people would crowd in thousands to be

treated by him.

She broke off. 'Will you come to Klitzinger's again, to-morrow?' she asked, putting her arms round my neck. 'I'll be there, too.'

But she had already rung the bell, and the hall-porter could be heard shuffling down the stairs.

'Be sure and come!' was all she could call out, as she hurried away so that no one should see us together.

Those were the events of that evening that roused me out of the peace I had felt in my cage. Little wonder that after such an introduction to the adult world, I had the mad idea—hopeful and confiding as I was—of reporting everything frankly to the Governor! I wanted to ask him to give me permission to go out, and also to allow me to get a specialist's opinion. It was the courage of intoxication—a proof

of faith that I owed the overruling powers for their friendly advances.

Luckily he did not allow me to utter the decisive words. He blustered and stormed because it was evident that the evening at the opera had been nothing but a cunning trick. Before doing anything he would make inquiries about the lady whom I considered such an important social asset.

The good man's aim in life was to eliminate the typical blind, street-corner beggar. He saw everywhere the spectre of folly, and the merciless consequences of tripping and blundering in the struggle for existence. He wished to protect his charges, when he sent them out into the world, from doubtful company and connexions.

So on the plea of a headache I got myself excused from the work in the brush factory that was my usual afternoon's employment, and disappeared with Edith, who nearly fainted with fright at the secrecy with which we had to slip out. The chief

thing was to be back in time for supper; for if my place were vacant then, that would betray me.

But all these cares were forgotten when I sat in the *diva's* room and heard her sing. There was some one with her who looked like a professor, hearing her rehearse a part, and we had to wait. But, after all, we had not been invited for any particular time.

At last the man took his leave. She accompanied him to the front door, and remained chatting with him for some time.

I was, perhaps, wanting in manners, but I felt impelled by the music that was still ringing in my ears, and I was afraid of forgetting it. So I sat down at the piano and, instead of tuning it, I began to play—at first softly, then with more and more passion—the air that the *prima donna* had been singing. I was glad that my memory had retained it—or did my fingers track the notes as in a dream?

I did not notice that the lady, for a long

time now, had been in the room listening to my playing. I was surprised myself that I succeeded in reaching phrase after phrase. My awkward fingers, heavy and hard with brush-making, were clumsy executants, and could not quite grasp the rapid chords; but I did the best I could.

'This is hardly the reason for our coming,' Edith at last reminded me. My rough, unpractised playing had affected her painfully in the presence of such a listener.

I stopped, aghast.

But the singer was interested and asked me, 'Do you play music like that in your Institution? That is an opera that nobody in the town knows.'

I was greatly pleased, and answered with a laugh: 'I have also heard it for the first time.' The idea that such great and beautiful music should be played in our Institution was too ridiculous.

She looked at me and Edith, and would not believe what I said. She pushed me

from the piano-stool, and played me something herself. Again I was greatly delighted, but the music was very difficult and stormy, and I had no idea how to play it. Apparently however she was pleased with the way in which my groping, untrained fingers vainly tried to give by means of shreds of phrases and broken chords, a sketchy outline of the tone-pictures that shone so clearly before me.

She inquired about my studies, and asked me why, exactly, I was going to be a

piano-tuner.

Edith explained the Governor's reasons. Since I had no family, he meant, and therefore no circle of friends, there would be little prospect of my finding the requisite numbers of pupils if I took up teaching, especially as the prejudice against blind teachers could only be overcome by active, personal recommendation. A piano-tuner was far more readily trusted, and many of the blind had already entered that profession.

'And for that reason your talents are

senselessly and aimlessly to be wasted?' The singer could not understand it at all. She struck an extraordinary mixture of chords on the piano and made me name the lower third and the upper sixth. Then she examined my fingers.

'An ideal hand for a virtuoso!' she remarked. 'What joys await you as you strive to discover the finest possible interpretation and aim at perfection!' She went on to speak about intimate acquaintance with the masterpieces of art.

'But first of all one has to get a living,' said Edith shyly. 'If there should be time and opportunity after that . . .'

'No!' cried the singer, and her voice sounded harsh and broken with excitement. 'Above all, life must have meaning and worth. To have always enough to eat is the chief concern of those who have nothing better to do.'

Meanwhile I had produced my tools and begun my tuning. While the notes sounded through the room she explained defects. She arranged for my receiving lessons from the best possible teacher and hearing a number of concerts and operas, and advised me about the books and scores I ought to study at once. She envied me the experience I was about to enjoy, and became enthusiastic over the happiness of receiving new and great impressions and the burning, rapturous bliss of creation. 'For who knows,' she added, 'but you may create something of your own?'

I turned my tuning-key. I thought I had to. I drew it out, from time to time, in absence of mind, and then had to seek for it again among the mass of pegs; or else I had already gone on to the next string, and was continuing to strike the same note. It was a wonder no string broke.

Until then I had only come into contact either with mournfully solemn people who, by their unreality and hypocrisy, brought every lofty conception of life into disrepute, or with dull, prosaic souls, who were poverty-stricken in vocabulary. And to hear such soaring thoughts expressed with simple, almost shamefaced honesty was a new and fascinating experience for me. As I listened to her the door of a new world opened before me.

Edith, noticing how I was affected, tried anxiously to moderate the boldness of the singer's expressions. But with her quiet manner of speaking and her modest vocabulary she was no match for the impassioned artist.

Suddenly the *prima donna* caught my head and drew it back. 'Why are we discussing reasons and counter-reasons? Is the face not the most weighty argument?' she said, and laughing quietly, looked closely at me.

I felt the sweet, overpowering fragrance of some unknown flower, and did not dare to breathe. But the kiss did not come. After caressing my neck she let me go, and turning to Edith, she said: 'I am quite sure his father was of noble birth and his mother an artist. Don't you think so?'

She spoke without lowering her voice in the least.

I shrank as if from a blow. I could not understand, since she was so fastidious and kind, and had such a lofty conception of her art, how she did not feel the wound she was dealing to my deepest and most

tender feelings.

Little attention was paid to the work I was supposed to do. The singer did not even take the trouble to notice that I had finished my tuning. She only asked as we took our leave: 'When, then, am I to bring my car for you?' But no mention had been made before of her coming for me. I did not know why she was doing so, or where she was going to take me. She settled a day.

On the way home Edith told me that the car of which she had spoken belonged to a friend of hers, and that I was not to take too literally what she had said about settling a date. She would probably come on quite another day.

We soon saw that we had stayed too long,

and we had to hurry, especially on the hilly street that led from the tramway terminus to the Institution. When at last we reached the garden in front of the house, and heard the supper-bell, Edith summoned all her strength to ask me not to be angry if she could no longer come to take me out. To do so would involve a rather callous and unscrupulous treatment of Peter; for it might embarrass him and endanger his position in the Institution. His abetting me in my disregard of express prohibitions could be only too easily discovered. I might, perhaps, take it amiss of her, but she could not reconcile such conduct with her conscience.

She spoke simply and quietly in her own reasonable and leisurely fashion, and if she was breathless, it was simply because we had been hurrying so fast. How sensible she was! I was cut to the heart. She had been the first person who had taken any trouble with me, or spoken kindly to me. It was quite inconceivable that she should now desert me like a

stranger. I might have said a good deal to her; I might have told her that I myself could not go on any longer with these furtive meetings, and that the influence of the *prima donna's* powerful friends with the Governor might help to make things easier. But I felt too bitter, and I was in too much of a hurry to reach my place in the dining-hall.

'Yes, yes!' I answered, outwardly calm, but raging inwardly. 'I suppose you are right. Perhaps it will be all the better if we are not seen so much in each other's company.' And I actually forgot to utter the slightest word of thanks. Her petty fears seemed very despicable compared to

the lofty ideas of the singer.

It was not until long afterwards that I learned the nature of the information that had reached the Governor's ears and had determined his decision. Marina Epare's reputation was none of the best; and she

was deeply in debt. In addition to this her real name was Mizzi Eppert, and she was the daughter of a hall-porter in Graz.

The Governor procured work for me in the large piano warehouse of J. B. Kotzer. After gaining some experience I was to be paid by piece-work on a rising scale, and, perhaps, in the end, given a fixed monthly salary. The Governor never said another word about the singer or my request. This far more useful proposal was, in a way, his answer to it. He only said that private tuning was not advisable at that stage of my training.

But, after all, the singer managed to have her way. Any idea pursued with imagination is stronger than a whole world of facts, even when these are represented by such a man as Kotzer.

I had hardly been two or three days at work in the bustle and noise of the large, cold room, amid the din of people coming and going and of customers tentatively strumming several pianos at once, when suddenly Fräulein Epare stood beside me. She said a word or two, and in a moment, precisely at a time near midday that was best suited for my work, I was seated beside her in a well-appointed, softly cushioned, flower-scented limousine, driving, so to speak, in a small, noiseless drawingroom. But whither ?—I hardly knew, and did not dare to ask. It would have seemed stupid to do so, seeing that she so obviously assumed that I knew.

She made tactful efforts to console me for something or other, and help me to overcome my deep emotion. She said I was not to think about what was going to happen. I was to let the moment come naturally.

She drew my hands towards her as if to warm them, leaning closely over me and

kissing my eyes.

But it was of no use. My agitation and suspense only increased. I was beginning to guess what it all meant. She tried the effect of cheerfulness. 'If it succeeds,' she said, 'you must be my coach, my

correpiteur, and travel with me all over the world.'

I asked what a correpiteur was, stumbling over the word. She laughed, but was quite serious when she drew out a card and wrote a note on it to a gentleman who was to teach me English, Italian, and French. I wondered when I was to find time for these lessons. For I had not a moment to spare in the present stress of work. But I did not say anything. She was not able to conceive any hindrance to a thing she considered necessary. Besides, the importance she was placing on such matters seemed to imply a very high estimate of my future career. Was it for me to raise objections?

We arrived at last. The lady pushed me rather clumsily through the door of the car, and when I stumbled she shook with such wrath and fear that I, in my turn, became helpless and uncertain.

We did not go into the crowded waitingroom. Fräulein Epare was at home in the house. She spoke a few confidential words to the servant who opened the door, and without being announced we went into the

consulting-room by a side passage.

After all, the doctor's suggestion that had sounded so improbable on that eventful night had become a definite, tangible reality! Was it possible? Was it true? Was I to become like other people, and never again to be a trouble or an embarrassment to anybody? The glory of the world was unveiled! I might even conduct an orchestra!

The two of them joked and talked in a lengthy greeting. I was, as it were, thrust aside. They knew nothing of my trembling suspense. Other things were more important to them—the new opera, Marina's part in it. He called her Marina! I was sure about it now-this was her friend!

Her manner with him was ironical, almost cold. But it seemed to please him. It was perhaps only a rather effective disguise for her tenderness.

Dr. Kessner was a man of whom one might be afraid. His suave manner and his jovial coarseness were equally insincere. Only occasionally—it would be hard to say how; perhaps by a burst of laughter or by the tone of a word or by a movement—the true nature of the man was suddenly revealed, as through the cracks of a mask.

At last he came forward to me and took me between his knees. I heard the click of an instrument; then he spurted something into my eyes and, quickly bending a little closer over me, he raised my eyelids with his delicate, effeminate fingers, saying: 'Madness! They must not be touched. Your eyes would only be disfigured.' Then, turning significantly to Fräulein Marina he said to her: 'And surely that would be a pity!' She must have made him a sign, for I did not hear her answer.

His verdict did not crush me so utterly as might have been expected. The sweetness of the hope had been much greater than the bitterness of the disappointment. Perhaps I had never really taken the possibility in earnest. I understood now why

the Governor and the doctor of the Institution had treated my request for renewed examination with indulgent silence.

On the way home I had to console Fräulein Marina, who was scarcely able to talk to me. She was evidently annoyed at having spoken so foolishly the other day, and indulging in such rose-coloured visions of my future. As for me, I actually felt a load fall from my heart. I had the impression of being safer and more at home in an existence that had now become a matter of course.

Besides, in my new surroundings, all the external limitations of my lack of sight seemed to have fallen away. I seemed to be able amost to divest myself of my blindness. In the first place there was a telephone at my disposal in the piano warehouse. How enchanted I was when I learned how to use it! It was as if whenever and wherever I liked, I could gather up and direct into a channel the unattached voices of my loved ones, and throw out my own voice like a lasso to

catch the desired response. Besides, whoever was speaking to me on the telephone was in no way my superior. He could not see my face any more than I could see his. And while I could not possibly have visited Fräulein Marina so often uninvited, I could always find a pretext for ringing her up.

I had no need to ask anybody what I was permitted and what I was forbidden to do. I left the Institution early in the morning, and returned in the evening. During the day I was under no control but that of the head of the firm, J. B. Kotzer. He was an utter miser, and liked getting free tickets for the Opera. Fräulein Epare had found that out on her first visit to the warehouse. Besides, she brought him customers, or rather he hoped that she would. In short, she had only to put in an appearance and say a word in my favour to make a marked improvement in my relations with the chief. He would then grant me all sorts of privileges.

When the half-day's work expected of

me—tuning two pianos in the morning and two in the afternoon-was completed, I could spend the rest of the time as I chose. I could play on whatever piano I liked in the remote end-room of the warehouse, unless some client happened to penetrate as far. When one of the employees had ten minutes to spare to escort me, I could go to old, stuttering Mr. Truebach and take my so-called lessons. Kotzer, I knew, would not betray me to the Governor. It would not have been of any advantage to him, and, besides, there were Fräulein Marina's free tickets. In reality Truebach no longer gave lessons, and on account of his weak heart he hardly ever left his house. I could visit him whenever I liked. It was a masterly stroke on Marina's part to send me to him. He took great pleasure in his conversations with me, though that was in no way flattering to me. The reason was simply that I knew nothing and he knew everything that I required in composing. Perhaps that was the whole extent of his knowledge; but I could have no idea of this. I was firmly convinced that he knew all that was to be known about music.

As he could not talk much with me while I was playing to him, we were a great deal more occupied with theoretical than with practical subjects. His affection for me and his pride in my progress made him overburden me with work. I should probably have found it too much, even if I could have devoted the whole day to study. As it was my business life gave me little opportunity for serious concentration, and it was late at night before I got home.

So, tightly wrapped in my cloak, I stole down when all were asleep, and worked through half the night in the deathlike silence of the chilly schoolroom. I built up, or perhaps I ought to say, I worked out, according to the strict, old rules, polyphonic choruses with second, third, fourth, and fifth varieties of accompanying melodies, that wound in and out of the ground-work of an ancient chorale. They were written for sixteen voices, growing steadily richer

and more difficult, so that even the orchestral choirs of the old Netherlanders could hardly have sung them.

The sonatas and piano studies, choral preludes and fugues for the organ I could transpose into sound only bar by bar, from the dotted maelstrom of my Braille manuscript, in order to fix them in my memory, for I did not dare to risk being heard playing such unknown music in the Institution. I had to rely on my leisure moments at the warehouse for overcoming the difficulties of execution. In addition to this Truebach demanded from me, 'as a sort of relaxation,' practical application, i.e., essays in composition. And these appealed to me most of all.

He had evidently no conception of my mode of living, and I took care not to enlighten him, as he would probably then have stopped the lessons. Occasionally, when he thought I was not looking well, he would give me long lectures on the prime necessity of physical health and strength for every professional man.

Chords and melodies haunted me all day long, pursuing me in my very dreams. They came sometimes as dotted groups of notes, sometimes as the mere tactual sensation of my fingers gripping the keys, and sometimes as an incessant, mental repetition of the tunes.

I had already in the past often been obliged to work at night when I needed any money, say for fruit or tram fares or even for that opera ticket. On these occasions I used to copy for my wealthy fellow-scholars books of which only a few or imperfect copies existed. I did not require much sleep, or rather I did not feel the want of it; though, certainly, if I sat still anywhere during the day when it was fairly warm, or when I had just had a meal, I immediately fell asleep, in spite of the loudest conversations carried on close beside me.

In addition to this my nervous tension induced the rapid growth of an æsthetic susceptibility that reacted too strongly and too readily to any stimulus. The

desperate effort I made with all my powers, and my perpetual hunger for excitement, resulted in an incredibly exalted sensation of pleasure, achievement, or suffering. Everything became too vivid, and the unnatural concentration I required for the least exertion became a necessity for me.

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Fräulein Marina had a very varied circle of friends, and cultivated a special manner for each of them.

Through time I learned to know them all. Sometimes she sent her maid or her chauffeur to bring me to go over some music with her, either to make sure that I was progressing or simply to sing me some new piece; but occasionally also she invited me when she had an afternoon party that might give me pleasure or be of some advantage to me. She felt responsible for my development; she was educating me.

Once she even punished me, when she learned from Truebach of my choral compositions and improvisations, which I had never mentioned to her. A famous composer happened to be in the town at the time and Truebach wanted her to get him to take an interest in my work. I never knew this, and certainly I should not have shown my attempts, if Truebach had told me of his plan. I never meant to present her with anything that was not great and perfect.

The composer, who had, as a matter of fact, been on a visit to Marina, had left before she heard of my neglect. This so infuriated her against me that she would have nothing more to do with me. She no longer sent for me, and when I called she was either particularly engaged or 'not at home.' If I telephoned she rang off at the first word.

What could I think of this sudden, unwarranted change except that her affection for me had been a mere whim?

During those weeks I learned that

our most passionate feelings can be powerless, and can assert no claim on others.

I sent her a cycle of songs in unrhymed verses of my own, not with the intention of propitiating her, for I no longer hoped to be able to do that, but to give her some idea of my gratitude and of the tumult of my feelings, without obtruding my presence and my personality. Along with the songs I sent a letter from an unknown admirer: and, as I was anxious to have her reply and criticism, in order to give an address, I had the fantastic idea of personating a lodger at Hapmann's. Hapmann was one of the pensionnaires at Klitzinger's, a former tenor who had lost his voice through drink, and was now being employed in a subordinate capacity at a music shop. was he who had copied the songs into my Braille manuscript. How could I imagine that this former professional singer wrote in so amateurish a fashion that any one would know at a glance that the manuscript was not only not written by the composer

himself, but that he could never have seen it?

The very next day the car came for me as if it were a matter of course, and as if there had been nothing unusual in the long absence.

There was a noisy gathering at Fräulein Marina's. She greeted me in a rather casual and formal manner. As soon as possible I retired into a quiet corner of the drawing-room, and dreamed of the days when the hostess had sometimes sat with me in a nook like this, forgetting for quite a time the rest of the company.

Suddenly I was startled by a crash of chords on the piano. It was the prelude to my first song.

Marina was playing, and, as she played, she spoke casually about some songs she had received from an unknown person, which were not without merit, though they were rather rough and formless. Still she had been able to include one of them in the programme for her next concert.

Had I heard aright?

My dream of these melodies was to be changed into living sound by her dear,

glorious voice!

In the midst of the applause between two songs she called across to me in a loud voice to come to the piano. She knew how difficult it was for me to move about in the large room where people were standing about in haphazard conversation. But that was her stern method of curing me of my shyness and clumsiness.

She asked my opinion about several points, and spoke in a disparaging and amused fashion about the amateurishness or extravagance of many a phrase.

I was the last of the guests to leave, and I remained standing for a moment. I knew something would have to be said, but I could not find words for it.

As soon as we were alone she broke out. It was outrageous stupidity on my part, she said, not to have tried to impress her with my work, and, through her, other influential people! 'Or is there something worse than thoughtlessness or inability to see what is essential? Is it want of confidence in yourself? Any one that does not work with the conviction that he is producing something remarkable, is very likely not worth troubling about.'

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Everything that Marina did for me or compelled me to do, everything she said to me even about the most trivial amusement, had to be related to the great goal to which she was leading me. She applied the same principle to herself. Accordingly she did not think it possible that I could be overburdened with work; she regarded my excessive toil as a confirmation of her belief in me and in my future career.

I did not know it, but it was as though I loved a phantom. Sometimes it seemed to me as though it was only her voice, her penetrating look, and the scent of the unfamiliar flowers around her that were real. When she was pleased with my

work, pulling me by the ears, bending back my head and embracing me in her enthusiasm, I had the feeling that she was not thinking of me personally, but simply of the fact of my existence and my talent. When she bent over me at the piano, as she sometimes did in order to explain some point to me, and the mysterious, exotic scent of her flowers floated intoxicatingly around me, when the warmth of her face radiated close to mine, and the strands of her hair fluttered across my brow, it would have been unthinkable for me to touch her. She was not a woman to be desired and won; she was full of passion and she understood the passion of others, but she did not take it seriously, and forgot it the next moment. I was not afraid of her mockery or indignation, but of her boundless want of comprehension.

I often puzzled over the reason for her ever having taken any trouble with me. Had I by any chance some decorative value for her? True, she had discovered me; my development was one of her triumphs. I was her latest hobby, people said.

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Perhaps I was only able to endure this life because of the cheerful evenings I spent at Klitzinger's, for I went there now more and more frequently. It was not that I could find rest in that company; but the counteracting tension, and the entirely different nature of the effort and activity that were demanded of me produced a certain equilibrium.

I was often busy at the warehouse after working hours; or, at any rate, I told them so at the Institution. So they took no notice if I was absent from the evening meal, and I could stay out until far into the night.

I became a persona grata at Klitzinger's. Not only Hapmann and his set, but the other boarders as well had a much more favourable opinion of my piano-playing than Fräulein Marina or my teacher. I tried to pick up everywhere the latest

popular tunes or dance-music. To the great amusement of the company, they had only to whistle or sing a tune and I played it just as they chose, either boldly and racily, or with sickly sentimentality, but always with an impressive profusion of chords. None of the regular Sunday professionals could do that!

I found an immense pleasure in the rough friendliness and gratitude of these people, and enjoyed their coarse frankness and their sentimental moods.

And yet it was not they, but my admiration of Milka that drew me there. This world was Milka, a part of her, belonging to her strong body, her deep laugh, her rough speech.

The men there considered her beautiful. And yet she was proudest of me and of my timid, awkward, though no less passionate wooing. Very probably, since I was unable to see her beauty, she thought that I somehow appreciated her in a different and more inward fashion. What pleased her about me was just my being unlike the

others. And yet I thought I had to resemble the men in her world in order to gain her favour. I began to take drink, although at first it almost nauseated me, and I was astonished myself at the large quantities I was able to consume.

For some time now, as I had expected, Kotzer had considered my work worth some remuneration. I succeeded for a while in keeping this a secret at the Institution. I did not trouble to think what would happen if the Governor should ask some day what had become of the money. The sums, which no doubt he would have regarded as considerable, did not, however, go very far. I had often to be thankful to the boarders-indeed I had come to depend on them-when they helped me to pay my reckoning in return for my playing. There was nothing derogatory in my accepting that assistance from them. On the contrary, my prestige increased the more I needed, and the less I knew how I should manage to pay.

It was not until I thoroughly understood

the talk and the manners of these people that I noticed how many fluttered round Milka and tried to cut each other out. They were all afraid of the doctor, Milka more than any of them. Nobody believed her to be faithful to him; but they did not dare to approach her unless furtively and cautiously. As for me I was trusted by the doctor. He talked to me in a different way than he did to the others. In that place we were, to a certain extent, the only two who drew to one another, although we hailed from different quarters. He was not even offended that I had allowed the other doctor to persuade me against the operation.

'You are young yet,' he said; 'you can afford to wait, for a time, until the operation has been incontrovertibly tested, and until even those people who ridicule everything they have not thought of themselves have come to believe in it.'

Who could doubt that he only cared about the operation for my sake?

He also talked a good deal of his strenuous

work in the Infirmary, saying that it did not allow him a moment's leisure to earn money, by private lessons or otherwise, for his examination fees.

I do not know why most of the company, even the bar-keeper, treated him with a sort of diffident consideration; perhaps it was because he had given them successful medical treatment. He exploited their respect with unostentatious superiority. Yet he could also be artlessly obliging, and on many occasions he was very kind to me.

One evening the others, for a joke, kept on noiselessly refilling my half-emptied glass, and I went on drinking, without having any idea of how much I had taken. Other things distracted me. It was a very exciting evening. A daring burglary that had been committed in the town was the subject of the conversation. Among us at the table sat Stetzer, the uncannily clever electrician, with the magnificent bass voice, who never could make up his mind to work and who always had money. He was

talking with animation to Hapmann about his adventures with ladies of higher rank, in the days when he was still on the stage.

We could not tell why, but it seemed somehow plain to us all that he was the man whom the police were looking for in vain. And on this very day, instead of sitting, as usual, lazily silent over his game and drink, he seemed ready for all sorts of jokes, and talked incessantly. We did not, in our anxious and oppressed mood, feel as if any of us had done anything wrong, but as if some misfortune had befallen one of our number.

On that evening a thing happened that I had always considered impossible.

I got dead drunk. It seems I was very amusing; I sang and whistled and finally embraced Stetzer with heart-breaking sobs, vowing that I would go to prison with him, if he would swear never to do such a thing again.

A council of war was held, and the doctor offered to drive out himself to the Institu-

tion, and tell the porter something about a temporary indisposition of mine.

Milka was to take me to her house and let me sleep off my intoxication there.

Her rooms were not altogether unfamiliar to me. One evening, not long before, as I

entered Klitzinger's, Milka had without a word taken my arm and led me to her house. Probably on that evening the opportunity

was specially favourable.

We descended a long flight of steep, slippery stairs, that smelled damp and mouldy. When the door closed behind us there reigned a dead silence in the low, stuffy room with its loose stone flags. But outside, all round the house, scolding women, children and noisy workmen were making a confused din.

She did not make much ado over the soft surrender of her lovely, adorable body. The tender caresses of her strong limbs had something of the awkward power of a regal animal.

When I woke up out of my intoxication I felt none of the usual after-effects, but only a slight, almost pleasant fatigue. How long it was since I had slept so satisfyingly! It was late afternoon, been lying awake for some time on the unfamiliar sofa with its torn cover, in that atmosphere of stale tobacco, coffee, and sickly iodoform, wondering in a leisurely fashion and with no particular astonishment where I really was, when Milka came in rather hastily and breathlessly. She brought in from the streets the fresh, keen scent of snow. She was glad to find me already awake, as though that were a merit of mine, and bent tenderly over me. She regretted having been absent so long. Her grandfather and the doctor had given her a great number of commissions.

But I sat up, avoiding her lips. An audacious mood took possession of me. No! I said, I did not want this condescension, this pitying favour, this motherliness! It seemed to imply that I was not grown-up yet. I was going to be her master! And

she should be my slave, and tremble before me, as she did before the doctor! It must be either that or nothing!

I told her she did not love me. She had only been giving alms to a beggar.

She stood there quite confused and helpless, staring in fright at my angry, hurt countenance, and clasping her hands. How was she to explain to me that all I imagined was pure nonsense? How was she to make me grasp the fact that she loved me very much indeed?

She sat down beside me; she had not the gift of facile speech. At first I thought she wanted to change the subject. She spoke of her grandfather, who, she said, was a little mad. He imagined he would die of hunger some day. He ate continuously, but was unwilling to spend a single farthing on his food because he was scraping money together for the time of need that was sure to come. Who knew where he might be lying ill and destitute to-day, but for the doctor? 'The doctor is the only one whom he allows to order him, and he has to

be ordered. That is the only reason for my having him here, though I am sorry for him, too. He also would be in misery to-day if I did not look after him, and let him live and study here. His only thought is how to become, some day, a great man in his profession.

I knew that this was not in the least her opinion of the doctor, but I enjoyed her humble readiness to say whatever I wanted.

She merely felt pity for the doctor, she said, but she really loved me. She wanted to persuade me of this, and perhaps, at the moment, she actually believed it herself. Ah! her only desire was to see me happy and contented, and tender with her without caring for anything else!

But I did not give in so easily.

If she really cared for me she must tell me which of the Klitzinger set she had already loved.

She nestled close to me. Why did I torture her? she said. What was she to answer me?

But I remained obdurate. I was not

willing to be her plaything, I told her; she must confide in me if she loved me.

She persisted in her caresses. She could not think what had come over me, she said.

How delightful it was to resist her, and let her display her coquetry without taking any notice of her entreaties! She did not lose patience. What a docile soul lived in this tense, powerful frame!

Suddenly there was a loud knocking at the door, repeated three times at regular intervals.

She started up in fright. I was to pretend to be still asleep. We ought long ago to have been at the Institution. She would put on her cloak at once, she said, so as to make it appear that she had just come in.

But I held her fast. No, no! I said, embracing her. Now was the time for her to prove that she loved me. I kissed her and forced her down on to the cushions.

She trembled, but did not dare to resist.

The knocking outside became more violent and angry. The doctor shouted some-

thing. He had probably seen a light through the chink of the door.

Oh! how frightened she was of him! She pleaded with me, but I grew more tender and insistent.

There were a few more knocks at the door, and then the footsteps died away.

'What shall I tell him?' were probably Milka's thoughts. 'What will happen?' But she did not say anything. In her excitement she clasped me tighter and more convulsively to her, as though she would never let me go.

A tinsmith, up at the window in the courtyard, was hammering away at his tins; from the wine-bar next door broken crockery went crashing down on a dustheap, and the shouts of workmen lifting and loading something could be heard at regular intervals.

This crashing and shouting and hammering will always be inseparable from my memory of Milka's kisses and of the wild, wonderful embrace of that humble slave.

When we went out the doctor suddenly

appeared in the street. He had probably been waiting at the gate or at the corner. We had only taken a few steps when he came up from behind. He showed no signs of anger or of any other emotion.

Milka could not understand this; it only frightened her the more. She began to talk wildly in her excitement.

But I soon realized that he had been relieved to see that it was only I.

He did not love Milka; she was merely his tool and plaything. I did not constitute a danger or a source of harm. I could have no influence on the girl, nor could I oust him.

Moreover, he had a special intention with regard to me, and it suited him to get me into Milka's power, and thus into his own.

Peter Kall, who was my neighbour in the dormitory and at the dinner-table, as he had also formerly been my companion during lessons, hated me. He was not the only one who did so. They all hated me at the Institution, because of the freedom I enjoyed, and because I was in touch with the wider life outside, while they were still little schoolboys in bondage. What were my special claims? I had always been in bad odour with the teachers, and I was not a day older than any of them. The officials and domestics treated me as if I were an independent young man, though that was certainly not the case.

Although hardly any of them possessed a watch or ever woke up, they noticed, after a time, that I often came home late and worked half the night downstairs in one of the schoolrooms. But to let this be known, or to denounce it at headquarters in order to bring about my downfall, would even in thought have been utterly impossible for them.

It is evident, therefore, that there was no plot or any preconceived purpose in their venting their hatred on me so effectively as they did. It was one Sunday afternoon—the only day which I spent in the Institution. I was sitting in the schoolroom near the hot-water pipes with their snake-like coils. I had my work before me, a fugue on an old chorale that had an original second subject. I was happy. The *stretti* fitted, and I could convert them at the most varied intervals.

In a trice, so to speak, I arrived at the organ-point of the final climax. I could now relax my tension and the cramped concentration with which I had been listening to my music in imagination, cut off from the outside world. The warmth around me had its effect; the tedious conversations of those who were sitting beside me sounded like a murmur; the five-finger exercises on the piano droned like machinery—and I fell asleep. Perhaps I also snored.

As I heard afterwards, Peter Kall was the one who began. He took my arms from the desk and laid me lengthwise on the bench, calling on the others to show them that even this had not wakened me. Who could tell where I had been the night before, when I was so tired as that?

One of them tried to take off my shoes, in order to tickle me, another my coat, and then one garment after the other.

It was not until they had finally set me almost naked on my feet, and pulled and punched all my limbs, that I woke up slowly. I reached out to the wall behind me against which they had leaned me, and asked whether the bell for rising had rung. I thought that it was morning and I had just got out of bed.

What happened after that was probably simply a sequel, and not any concerted plan. They had not intended to do anything really cruel. They merely meant to play a little practical joke, and inflict a trifling humiliation on me, because I seemed to them to have grown too proud.

My questions became more and more confused and anxious. The others did not answer, but continued to talk across me to one another, as though I had not said anything; or they made entirely irrelevant

and senseless replies full of regret and helpful solicitude, as though I were an invalid or a child. In growing desperation I finally became so bewildered that I could not trust the use of my tongue or the touch of my fingers. Instead of the dormitory bed that I expected, I encountered the fantastic, senseless outlines of objects which I did not recognize as school forms, since I could only touch small parts of them such as their backs or corners. Searching more and more anxiously and hurriedly for something tangible, I became unhinged, and at last as a result of their nonsensical answers given with pretended anxiety and fright, I lost my senses completely. I was terrified at the meaningless vacuity and the mad whirl all round me. I roared, shrieked, wept, and fought. I rushed after one, then after another, hoping to lay hold of something concrete in order to seize and unmask the phantoms that slipped away from my grasp.

No doubt by this time they would have liked to put an end to it all. But how

could they do that? They all shrank away and fled in terror from me. I rushed after them, beating against the door, and fleeing wildly up the passage after those torturing ghosts. Hearing the noise people came from all directions. Even the Governor flew out of his room.

What aggravated matters was the fact that all this happened during the visiting hours on Sunday afternoon, and strangers were in the House.

The inquiry did not throw much light on the affair. Nevertheless my profound sleep in broad daylight, my quarrel with my comrades, and my proud, rebellious replies, all told against me.

The Governor realized that there must be an end to my stay in the Institution. He felt especially bitter at my obstinate sullen silence, when I did not choose to reply to a question, and at my cool superiority with regard to the sacred rules of the House. So he said he would wash his hands of me.

But that simply meant that all measures

concerning me were taken behind my back. He induced Kotzer to fix a regular monthly salary, and put me to board with a pious family who lived near the warehouse, and who, like my chief, pledged themselves to send reports at stated intervals to the Governor.

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One of Marina's sayings was: 'Either to achieve the highest or to remain unknown is the wish of every real genius. Nothing can be more ridiculous than a mediocre artist!'

This saying took firm hold of me and I was engrossed with the problem of putting every moment to the best advantage. Everything that came my way had either to be an inspiration for work or a means towards the recognition of my worth,

And then there was her expression—
'The Thraldom of the Unendowed'—
which she had jocularly applied one day to
a concert audience who had had to endure

the performance of a difficult work. This phrase flashed a sudden light on much that I had dimly felt for a long time, but I gave it a wider application. No events of persons in my environment were to have any significance for me except in so far as they aided my development. This did not take the form of a definite, explicit resolve, but was rather a feeling that was the mainspring of all my actions. The fact is that I had been too suddenly transformed from a despised, forsaken, down-trodden pupil, who had but little prospects of gaining much in the future by his work, into an admired young artist, who saw helping hands held out to him from all sides. and for whom experts prophesied a great career.

How profoundly I was moved, when I sat in the artistes' little room, after kissing Marina's slender, fragrant hand, before her appearance on the platform, and heard my songs ring out into the listening hall! I noticed for the first time on that occasion that Marina's voice and art had their

limitations. There was a good deal in her interpretation that was different from my conception of the music; but Her Highness could not readily bring herself to obey.

I thus outgrew the modesty that had made me apply a low standard to everything, and acquiring a cool superiority that saw little but faults anywhere, I looked upon a first-rate performance as a matter of course.

This made a great impression on the first journalist who visited me in that room. Very likely he expected to find me in a sort of blissful trance, when the applause in the adjoining hall fell like a heavy shower.

He was a tall, supercilious person, who in order, I suppose, to create a greater impression, spoke in casual, drawling tones, and apparently had no use for anything but irony. He interviewed me, and afterwards wrote an article for the papers, in which he traced the closest connexion between my blindness and my musical gifts.

A publisher paid me a considerable sum

for my cycle of songs. Marina's connexions were proving profitable to me. And this first payment of mine was my reason for immediately giving up my work at Kotzer's. It seemed to me absurd and undignified to tune pianos all day long in a noisy warehouse, and have only stolen moments left for my proper work and vocation.

And at the same time I left the pious family with whom the Governor had boarded me—an old married couple with two daughters already grey-haired. I was no longer troubled by their penury, their disapproving astonishment at my mode of life, and their anxious councils of war, where with heavy heart they drew up their report to the Governor in the way that would do me least harm.

I could not in any case have lived on my wage at Kotzer's. Moreover, the Governor allowed me only as much of it as he considered sufficient for my requirements; the rest he placed for me in the Savings Bank.

It was I myself who now removed, so to

speak, his supporting hand from me. But I am convinced that despite my refractoriness, he was most chagrined at my making it impossible for him to help me, or at least to stand somewhere unseen behind me and guide me.

Marina was greatly delighted when I told her of my decision. 'Let others run after bread and butter,' she said. But it did not occur to her to trouble about the new basis on which my life was to rest, or to give me any advice regarding it.

With the publisher's money I rented a garret. It was really a painter's studio. The sum was more than sufficient to meet the deposit for the first month's hire of a piano, which, though it was not new or of an enchanting tone, would be there for my sole use the whole day long. I was also able to afford a bed, a table, and a wash-hand basin. A chair seemed a superfluity to me—I preferred to buy a plentiful supply of writing-paper, Paul Bekker's book on Beethoven, that I liked so much, and to pay for a month's board at Klitzinger's.

It was certainly a patron's gift rather than a salary that Marina had obtained for me from the big publisher. But I thought of it only as a moderate start, and I made great plans for the future. I meant, first of all, to compose a concerted fantasia for chorus, soli, and orchestra. Truebach's fuller exposition of the art of instrumentation, it is true, had so far not got beyond the stage of promise, but I believed I had learned enough from the concerts I had attended to attempt original orchestral work.

How glad I was to be surrounded no longer by the atmosphere of a family in which I was a stranger. The freedom I enjoyed within my own four walls, where I was entirely dependent on my own resources, recalled my boyhood's dreams of a Robinson Crusoe island.

The room was terribly hot when I took possession of it. I ascribed the heat to the tropical summer day. But even if I had known what cruel cold this presaged for the winter, I should not have been very much alarmed.

An endless ocean of time spread before me.

This was not, at first, very helpful for my work. Many important desiderata, of which I had not dared to think before, were now within my reach. I was able to send for the finest scores and books from the great Lending Libraries for the Blind in Leipsic and Hamburg. The passion to embrace everything awoke within me, and the leisure to amplify details lessened the flow of inspiration and the feverish desire to reach completion.

But the intoxication of work remained. Sometimes I spent half the day, alternately at the piano and at the table, sitting in my shirt just as I had jumped out of bed.

If in this way I sometimes forgot the dinner hour, Milka brought my meal from Klitzinger's; and this, through time, became a permanent arrangement.

This was of no small advantage to me when my first payment for board came to an end. I did not trouble to find out

whether Milka or the proprietor or any one

else gave me credit.

If, when an idea haunted me, I had written in bed the whole night through, or stayed until the small hours of the morning with the jolly company at Klitzinger's, I would very likely be still asleep when Milka arrived.

With what tenderness and ever-growing passion she used to waken me by her caresses! I sometimes pretended to be in a kind of deep, cataleptic sleep and unable to rouse myself.

But afterwards she used to reproach me for not having locked my door at night.

In reality she was pleased to see me so casual and so careless of the necessities of everyday existence and of the risks I was continually running. Ah! she believed in my great future! My poverty and privations seemed to her almost like the bewitching of the prince in a fairy tale. Some day I would suddenly soar to honour and glory!

If, sometimes, after an indifferent or

adverse criticism of Marina's or of one of her friends, I had an uninspired day, and racked my brains in vain, Milka would be well aware of this. She would sit down beside me and tell me of her grandfather's latest follies, or she would relate stories about Hapmann and describe curious incidents the doctor came across in the lives of his hospital patients.

I often had no idea afterwards how I got home in the morning.

Without seeking help from Marina, I took my second volume of songs surreptitiously, so to speak, to the publisher. I was very happy. Scarcely six weeks had elapsed since the publication of my first volume, and I knew that these new songs were much better, more mature, and more thoroughly finished.

I hoped that the publisher would consider the manuscript while I was in the shop and pay for it immediately.

His slow, grating voice was as kind as ever, but he said that it was not possible to publish works by an unknown author in such rapid succession. The world was strangely afraid of new music.

How was he to know that I had counted on the honorarium almost as on a fixed

salary?

'Perhaps we shall see the success of your songs before long,' he said at last. 'Shall we not soon be meeting again at Fräulein Epare's?' No doubt he thought this was a good conversational finish. He was evidently in a hurry.

I made a rapid calculation as to when the next afternoon tea would be at Marina's, and looked upon his reference to it as an

informal acceptance of my songs.

When, somewhat confused, I took up rather too hurriedly the thick roll of music—for the copying of which I had, in the light of my grandiose vistas, paid Hapmann in advance, I forgot to propose their publication under another name, since my own was not acceptable. It would have made such a good impression if I had said that my only concern was for the renown of my work, and not of my name. But I

was already in the street when I thought of this, and I could not very well go back for that purpose.

I rarely knew hunger or actual want.

It is true Milka's visits were not regular, but she came quite frequently and was a much desired visitor. Very likely her miserly grandfather and the doctor made all sorts of difficulties for her.

If things went very badly I took my bag of tools from door to door in the neighbouring streets, asking if there were pianos to tune. I soon discovered that even in the poorer quarters there was work of this sort to be obtained in private houses, restaurants, or cinemas.

On one occasion Milka had to wait especially long and patiently at my door. She had heard me improvising on the piano and had supposed that I was absorbed in my work.

She had sometimes noticed how she startled me when she came in and how

difficult I found it to rise from the depths of my being into the external world. But on that day she had a special reason for not being in a hurry to interrupt me. She came to tell me that my piano would be taken away in the afternoon, Kotzer having declared that the payments on account for the arrears of hire were inadequate, and that, besides, the demand for pianos on hire was so great that he had no idea where to get a sufficient supply.

She sat on the top step with my dinner-basket beside her, listening to my playing. She did not care for that kind of music, and was annoyed that I did not compose an operetta, since I played such pretty things at Klitzinger's, shaking them easily

out of my sleeve.

And there was another announcement she had not had the heart to make, that had been weighing on her mind for days. The landlord had already let my room to some one else! His patience, too, was at an end. The new tenants were to take possession in the morning.

She was trying to think how she could soften the blow, when a lady hurried up the stairs and tried to go past her into my room. It was the first time that Marina had come to see me.

Milka tried to stop her. 'Had she not made a mistake?' she asked her. She was afraid it might be some one sent by the new tenants, or perhaps by some creditor.

Marina scanned her with interest. She mistook the girl's anxiety and curiosity for jealousy. Ah! she thought, so the young man understands that sort of connexion!

But she was in a hurry. 'No, no! it is not a mistake,' she replied, and went into my room.

No doubt Milka was astonished at my enthusiastic and confidential reception of my visitor, and was annoyed that I had never mentioned this distinguished acquaintance to her before.

Marina looked about her, horrified. 'But why did you never tell me anything about this? It is impossible to live in such a way.'

I had, at various times, been obliged to tell her a good deal about my precarious situation. She had even spoken about it frequently in the presence of others, holding me up as a model to the young men of the present day, who lived wrapped in cottonwool. And all the time she had really known nothing about my mode of existence! It was just as if everything that concerned others passed through a separate and unregulated portion of her brain. 'But a change will have to be made. What is that you are working at there?' she asked, pointing to the papers on my table. 'What were you playing when I came in?'

I hesitated for a moment; I had intended to surprise her with the completed work. I was already in the middle of the last ensemble passage, in which everything was leading up to the mighty unfolding of the finale. Instead of answering I began playing a part of it. She was silent. I played another part. She shook her head. She did not consider the music sufficiently

bold and revolutionary, and, besides, it was not important enough to be saleable.

I realized that it ought not to have been heard piecemeal, and that the contrasts of colour heard in an orchestra were lacking on the piano. A true conception of its form and originality was possible only when it was performed as a whole.

But I did not say this. I felt that such explanations would only make matters worse. Nevertheless I did not, I suppose, succeed in completely controlling my expression.

'What a pity I only heard of this composition for the first time to-day!' she said. 'I could have arranged for its being performed by a conductor of one of the choral societies, had I not been on the point of leaving on a tour.'

She had come to bid me farewell. In a few days she was starting on a great concert tour abroad.

No! she said, it had not come as a surprise; she had been in negotiation about it for some time.

That was all.

'What a pity!' she repeated once more, as though my life and future were not

depending on it.

She had come to invite me to a farewell dinner on that same evening. She had asked a number of nice, interesting people, she said. She was looking forward to it. And then on Sunday morning she would be off!

Then she spoke of the fabulous terms she had managed to extort by her hesitation and delay, from the Impresario. That should be a lesson for me in the future!

Milka had interrupted timidly several times, asking me to come and take my dinner, saying it was late and everything would be quite cold.

But I did not listen.

I waved her back, once, with furious impatience. I was accustomed to treat her without consideration. She had always submitted humbly to my moods. And, besides, I could not imagine what had irritated this kind, modest girl so much.

No doubt it was the contempt with which Marina treated her.

'Very well, then, if you are not hungry,' she wildly exclaimed all at once, interrupting Marina in the middle of a sentence with her harsh, broken speech, 'I won't trouble you any more.'

Then she hurriedly and noisily packed everything up again in her hamper. No doubt in her excitement she forgot her mission as a Job's comforter, or perhaps she did not wish to humiliate me before the lady. She was gone so quickly that I could not have said anything even had it occurred to me.

Marina laughed. But I felt her laugh like a blow in the dark, quite in keeping with the news of her departure. I had only heard that ring in Milka's voice once before when something had hurt her very deeply on the occasion of a quarrel at Klitzinger's. Otherwise I had never yet seen her hurt or angry.

Marina, too, left presently. She had a great deal of shopping to do, she said,

during these last remaining hours. At the moment of parting she tried with embarrassed circumlocutions to find out whether, and to what extent, she could advance me money.

But I would not understand.

I made it so difficult for her to make the offer that she desisted.

'To-night!' she called back from the door; 'without fail.'

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After the men had come in the afternoon and removed the piano, the landlord immediately appeared to ask me whether it was worth while to go to the expense of moving my few belongings, and whether I would not rather sell them. He could make use of them, he said.

All this seemed to me like a punishment for my unkind treatment of Milka. It had not only been the excitement of my meeting Marina and her unfavourable verdict on my work that had absorbed me to the point of forgetting Milka. No, the truth was—and I felt deeply conscious of it—I had been ashamed of her before Marina.

But what was I to do now?

I might have gone to ask Kotzer whether he had work for me. But I owed him so much for the hire of the piano that I would not have received any money for a long time; and, moreover, he had, no doubt, put some one in my place long ago.

It was a damp, foggy autumn evening. The streets smelled of soot and old clothes. I went to see Milka. It was not exactly an opportune moment for making apologies—I was forced to ask her to put me up. We had once before discussed such a possibility. I could sleep on the bench beside the stove in the kitchen. The doctor was absent the whole day, so that I could work in his room.

I still regarded all this as an impressive episode in the biography of a great man.

Milka was completely changed. She received me with indescribable hatred and would not listen to a word I said, when I started to explain to her the cause of my

abstraction and excitement during my conversation with Marina.

I had meant something special to her, she said. She had always had implicit faith in me. She had not imagined that the ugly, sordid selfishness of ordinary life had any part in the unsullied world in which I lived. The high opinion which I had of her had raised her in her own estimation; and she had been proud of that! But now she thought of me as a betrayer, cunningly exploiting my need, and taking advantage of her pity. She felt disgusted with me and was furious with herself for having fallen into the trap.

As I turned to go the doctor came in. He misunderstood the situation, although he must have heard Milka's raised voice from the outside. He doubtless regarded my embarrassment as that of the guest and suppliant, or at any rate he pretended to do so. He thought that Milka was afraid to let me stay there because of him. So taking my portmanteau from my hand, he put it aside, joking at the label of the

Institution with my number as inmate still on it, and then he unbuttoned my coat.

Milka did not dare to protest; she slipped from the room. Perhaps, after all, she did not wish me to be sent out helpless into the streets.

But that was not the reason for my staying. Nor was it the fact that I had nowhere else to go. I was pleased at the change in Milka, at her boundless contempt and hatred for me, due to an apparently trivial cause. It showed me how great her love for me had been and probably still was. And yet even that was not the whole reason. I wanted to humble myself before her; she deserved that of me. She should have her due. Or perhaps, after all, it was simply because I felt tired, ah! so terribly tired and discouraged.

Two feet away from me her grandfather lay asleep on his straw sack. He talked incessantly in his sleep, uttering, now and again, weird, unintelligible cries. The damp and heat of the low room prevented me from sleeping. Besides, there were all

kinds of vermin in the bed. The doctor and Milka were sleeping on the other side of the wall. I heard every one of their movements and kisses.

The whole day long Milka did not utter a word. Occasionally she placed some food before me, though not at the same time as the others had their meals, and then went out.

It is true that I did not seek her forgiveness and her love patiently or insistently. I could not make the effort.

Nothing was worth while. I had no strength of will left.

I no longer rested any hopes on my work. I neglected Truebach's lessons. I realized that his extravagant verdict which had led me astray only applied to the technical side of my compositions.

I called several times on all the influential musicians whose acquaintance I had made at Marina's and who, at her gatherings, had said so many flattering things about my songs.

Those whom I managed to see all told me

in the same indulgent manner that I had every right to be hopeful. But not one of them offered to help me. That was enough to show me what they thought of me.

The doctor thought I was almost ready for his operation. He often talked about the professions and the tempting opportunities that would be open to me if it was successful.

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Then one day I had a visitor. One of the rough, raucous children who were always playing on the stairs, came running down to the basement to tell me that a lady was asking for me.

Milka was washing the floor. I was leaning against the wall to be out of her way, listening to the sounds outside the window. The harsh, interwoven rhythms of the hammering of workmen in the court-yard above, might have supplied me with a good introductory atmosphere for an act of a new opera.

At the first word I recognized my visitor. It was Edith Kall. I did not quite know at first how to meet her, as the wash-tub and all sorts of other impedimenta were blocking the way. How familiar the sudden, unnatural effort of her slow, somewhat singing voice seemed to me, when she cried out to me in fear, saying that I was to remain where I was and she would come up to me.

I tried not to seem embarrassed. Fortunately I did not quite realize the awful state of things, and the spectacle I presented

in my present surroundings.

During this conversation everything that had so long made me sink almost unconsciously into deeper and deeper gloom became for the first time unbearable. It had not troubled me before, as I was doing nothing and wanted nothing and had grown absolutely indifferent about myself.

No doubt I was ill. In the morning when I tried to rise, the heaviness and inertness of my limbs were specially noticeable. Towards evening I generally felt a curious lightness, as though I were swimming or flying. My thoughts fluttered about so fast and airily and had such an endless, fleeting diversity that I could not follow them nor rely on them.

And now while I was talking to Edith, I found it difficult when I raised my head and tried to speak coherently, to grasp and follow what she was saying. I felt a whirl of convulsive blows like the drumming of a thousand fingers against my forehead and eyes. My eyelids quivered; rings seemed to form on my face and stiffen my cheeks. A curtain of kaleidoscopic, swift-moving objects seemed to hang between me and the speaker, and my scalp twitched at the innumerable, rapid motions so close to me.

It did not occur to me that I might be ill. I sternly tried to control the vagaries of my nerves, and probably showed in my conversation an unaccustomed, affected eagerness and a hurried, incoherent loquacity.

I asked her how she managed to get my

address; what Peter was doing, how far he had progressed in his studies, and what news there was from the Institution.

I did not understand her answers, although I heard her words.

She had come to ask me whether I would give a girl lessons on the piano at her house. It took some time before we arrived at an understanding. She thought that I was giving lessons like most well-known young musicians. She knew that I had given up my work at Kotzer's, and she had occasionally read notices of my compositions in the papers.

That was a good idea which in all my misery had never occurred to me. I might give lessons! But where should I find

pupils?

The people who frequented Klitzinger's and the actors and musicians at Marina's gatherings, took no piano lessons. Marina had thought that before I could teach I should have to complete my studies. Very likely it was too much trouble for her to get pupils for me or persuade parents to send

their children to me, although she helped me in other ways.

But Edith's young pupil was merely a pretext. She wanted to find out how I lived, and what was the matter with me. She had seen me one evening with Marina in her box at the Opera, shortly before she left. I was looking wretched and she hardly recognized me. She felt guilty, and reproached herself for the state I was in. She knew that it was Peter's fault. perhaps his alone, that I had been dismissed from the Institution; and she thought that my deterioration had begun from that time. She could not rest, and with the help of Marina's sister had succeeded in discovering where I lived. Edith was talking at random and rather helplessly. She did not get much response from me, and yet she could not very well go at once.

Our talk was inconclusive. I do not know how she got away. The swirling sensation round my eyes and my forehead became so much worse that I could not hold up my head.

A doctor, whom no doubt Edith had sent, came in the afternoon, and the next day I

was in a hospital.

It was wonderful to be lying so snug and still in a strange, well-aired room, without fear of Milka, and with full permission to be tired all day long, to refuse food and water and to sleep.

There were many other people lying in the same room, and I did not know a single voice. I had been rescued from life, so to speak, to be translated into a

healing, nameless void.

The sound of Edith's voice disturbed me, when, for the first time and then at regular intervals, it broke in upon my twilight sleep. The reason was, probably, that it tempted me, and drew me with longing once more into an adventurous and uncertain existence.

Whenever I awoke she was there. It seemed incredible to me. How could she spend the whole day in the hospital? She was already on an intimate footing with the doctors and nurses. At first I noticed this only by the tone of their whispered con-

versations. I could not rouse myself to listen or speak or move. But Edith was more and more evidently and persistently present. She spoke to me although I would not listen. She did not allow me to go to sleep when the doctor's round was over. She prepared all sorts of questions that could not fail to worry me if I left them unanswered.

She bent down with great anxiety over my lifeless face, and I forced myself with an effort to laugh. She mimicked the masters at the Institution—she had rather a gift for that—and I was moved to tears by her lively, clever, ingenious kindness.

At last I was able to follow, when she began to read me little stories, and finally we were able to discuss my immediate future. It was of the first importance that I should get something to do as I could not remain there much longer. The doctors became insistent. Every day there were serious cases that had to be refused for want of room.

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I had never been ill in my life before. I did not know the joy of the return of strength to a body that felt cleansed and renewed throughout. I imagined that my keenness and my passionate application to my new work were the result of the quiet, orderly life which Edith had created around me out of nothing, as though by enchantment. I thought I was animated by my love of teaching, my contentment, and my joy at the prospect of having an assured if limited existence, that did not entirely exclude the highest aims nor the most ambitious aspirations.

I was first of all appointed assistant lecturer on Theory in a small Academy for Music, and then secured, in addition, a slowly increasing number of private pupils.

I was living in Edith's house, on the second floor. When I entered my room for the first time I found clothes, linen, a fitted dressing-case, and the hundred other necessities of a comfortable, middle-class life, laid out for me like Christmas presents.

At first Edith pretended that all had been

purchased with the proceeds of a second edition of my songs. I did not find out until later, when the sum had long been repaid, that she had asked her father for a small loan.

I now saw a good deal of her family, who were not by any means what one might have expected from her quiet, peaceable nature.

She was Peter's step-sister, and Peter's mother did not care for her at all. Perhaps she really did not care for any one. She certainly hated her husband, who was an indifferent business man, but interested in all kinds of erudite subjects. He had been rich when she married him. But now things were continuously on the down-grade.

It was not easy for me to grasp the situation, or guess the reason for the heavy, depressing atmosphere of the home, which found expression in a sombre animosity. Edith never said anything about the matter to me, but she was devoted to her father. His wife, who still had the youthful desire to enjoy life, strove to get rid of Edith, by

marriage, preferably. But Edith remained, out of love for her weak, gentle father, whom she did not want to hand over to the tender mercies of his wife.

As a result of this antagonism an opposing force arose in Edith's silent, reserved nature, which made her a match for her stepmother. There ensued a subtle, secret conflict of wills, that became a source of hatred.

This struggle also included Peter, who had come home some time before this. Edith was not allowed to have any intimate relations with him or to do anything for him. This jealousy was not caused by any love on Peter's part; although when there was anything to be done that required patience and kindness, he was, after all, obliged to appeal to Edith.

But he was far too stupid to realize this, and allowed himself to be devoured with hatred of her.

So she was lonely; and the timid, wordless affection between her and her father was all that remained for her. I did not know that I, too, the more the number of my pupils increased and my reputation grew, became a cause of quarrel.

Peter had become choir leader at the Institution and organist in a large church—a post the Governor had obtained for him—and he probably had more to do than suited his lazy nature. Besides, owing to an impediment in his speech and a clumsy manner, he was little suited to be a teacher. Yet they regarded Edith's efforts on my behalf as indicating a want of affection for Peter. If she helped me and dictated material for lectures to me, it was looked upon as an open act of hostility.

At one time I spent almost every evening downstairs in their apartment, playing chess with the father, who liked to discuss politics and the latest musical events in the town, over his game. I knew he liked this, so I took no notice of all the hints and spiteful remarks which were meant for me.

Edith sat with her needlework, silent but happy when I coaxed her father out of his fatigue and depression. A different and forgotten personality seemed to awaken within him when he was roused by the discussion of some question, or by an exciting turn of the game.

But I found it becoming more and more difficult to do this. I felt often that an impenetrable, despairing depression was weighing on this family, which only seemed to be made worse by my presence. The poor man suffered intensely when I did not know what to talk about, and it was pitiful to see how he tortured himself in an effort to be polite and kind, and wring a few, casual remarks from his inward brooding.

So I stayed away more and more, and only talked to Edith when she came to see me. We never referred to the state of affairs at home. Probably that was often more than she could bear, but it was like her not to complain. The more deeply she was moved by anything the more difficulty she found in speaking about it.

We worked together. For my teaching I needed to overtake a great deal of ground. Truebach had, for the most part, taught me

only what was interesting and outstanding. He had been proud when he could omit many transitional and intermediate stages, especially when they were concerned simply with the technique of teaching.

So my stencil ticked away at the paper like an irregular clock in the silent room, while Edith carefully and slowly picked out the notes and chords on the piano. It is true we could not speak to one another; but it was only our surface attention that was involved. The work did not occupy our thoughts. These could communicate mutually; it seemed as though they met and stirred each other, filling the silence and making it alive. Sometimes when she left and we shook hands, it seemed as if we knew more of one another than when she had come.

When our fate was finally decided, it was not like coming to a sharp turning-point, or taking an important step; it was simply a natural process, so compelling as to be almost irresistible.

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At that time Edith came almost every evening.

I had long ago left their house and had been obliged to move from one furnished apartment to another, because no one could for any length of time bear my eight or ten hours of daily piano teaching and that was the usual number now.

Then I took a small flat—a room and kitchen, with a little anteroom between them. Month by month, as my savings allowed, I furnished the empty rooms and bare walls. The fitting-out of the kitchen was a fantastic idea, as it always remained in silent, holiday desuetude, and yet, in anticipation, I had it equipped to the last detail.

I certainly did not toil in vain. A surplus accumulated in spite of my many purchases. The number of my pupils increased. At the beginning of the school terms I had to refuse many new applicants, and my cordial personal relations with most of them made the work pleasant for me. The foundation on which my future career was to rest became broader and firmer.

One evening Edith came to accompany me to the theatre. Marina was playing in a new part. She had been home now for a long time from her concert tour, but I had not gone to see her. I excused myself by saying that I had too much to do. But probably the real reason was that I was afraid she would not approve my present way of living.

I longed to hear her voice once more. She was to appear in *Tosca*! I could not imagine how she would sing the part.

I did not notice anything unusual about Edith when she came in.

She sat and listened to what I had to tell her of the petty events of the day, while I made a note of my lessons and my daily earnings in my diary, and hastily ate my supper.

She even allowed me to hurry into the kitchen and change for the theatre; and when I came back, she actually wanted to leave, so difficult did she find it to speak.

But she could not go. She remained standing and grasped my arm convulsively.

For a time I did not know what was the matter. At last I guessed it by her gasping breath. I had never yet heard her cry.

The event had happened yesterday—that much I understood at last. That was why she had not come the day before.

Her father, crushed by the contempt and hostility of his wife and son, and perhaps also by self-reproach, had contracted heart-disease, though no one knew of it. Suddenly he had become uncontrollably excited about some insignificant affair, and, in a fury, had insisted on being blindly obeyed. This was so unbelievable in a man like him that even his wife was scared. Then growing tired he had collapsed, and becoming gradually weaker, had passed away as gently and slowly as it had been his wont to live.

She could not possibly remain another minute at home. She did not intend to return there. She would take refuge with a girl friend, she said; but she was too tired to leave at once, or see people and talk of her sorrow.

We sat down. I forgot to take off my coat. We heard the muffled sound of coal being shovelled into the stove and the humming of the hot-water pipes in the walls—the familiar noises that haunted the house.

I asked after Peter. She gave an evasive answer.

We sat there silently. I did not know what she was doing. Her silence and immobility separated and hid her from me. I wanted to say something, but I could not speak. Should I talk about the catastrophe or about other things? But how was I to approach her?

I grew anxious. Possibly she was sitting, lost in thought. But what if she were exhausted, or had a swoon or a heart attack? And she could make no appeal to me!

I listened to her breathing. I bent closer to her. She did not stir or show any sign of surprise! I bent closer still, my fingers touching her tear-stained cheek. Her head had sunk back as though it were lifeless! I screamed.

She started; perhaps she awoke. She stroked my face gently with her hand. Her voice was almost placid again. She smiled because I was so happy at hearing her voice.

I jumped up and rummaged about everywhere for some food. I rushed downstairs to see if the shops in the building were still open.

There could be no question of her being allowed to go away again. I did not waste any words. I seized my new sofa, of which I was so proud, and pushed it into the kitchen, to serve as a couch for myself for the night. She tried to prevent me, but she had not strength enough. And when I insisted very peremptorily on her retiring, and turned to leave the room, she came up close to me and put her arms round me.

It was a strange moment, conscious as I was of the delicate outlines of her young, too slender body and the trembling of her rounded cheeks beneath my kisses. How hard it was not to forget everything, and,

in youthful ardour, to kiss wildly and for ever! But no! Very quietly and gently I held her a little apart from me, touching her hair and brow tenderly with my lips.

Then I left her, and stood outside the room listening while she slowly undressed and went to bed.

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The following morning we only discussed the arrangements for that day and the next. She once more referred timidly to the possibility of her living at a friend's and looking for employment. She knew how much it hurt me to banish the fantastic hope of which we did not speak, of which, perhaps, we avoided the thought.

But it was contrary to her nature to float along in this prudent way without having any definite end in view. Before long, with her simple and natural resoluteness and without trying to mask her misgivings and her seriousness with irony, she began to call things by their right

names and follow them to their logical conclusion.

I tried to prove that my income would be sufficient for both of us; but she showed me that my calculations were not quite correct. She felt certain that we should have cares; but she consented nevertheless.

We became part of one another. Not only had fate made us both lonely from childhood, but we possessed in our very blood the characteristics of the lonely—their fear of new events and unfamiliar people, their shrinking from reality and disillusionment, and their excessive longing for emotional stimulus. The decision which was to unite our lives held no anxious question for us. The life of intimate, secure, confiding love, out of which others step into wedlock, began for us. We were married.

In those days I ventured to go and see Marina again. I held a valuable trumpcard, with which to justify myself. What did it matter if I spent my life as a day labourer, when my inspiration, released by my soaring happiness, flowered in such abundance that large, completed parts of an opera had been finished with ease.

Edith would sit and listen quietly when I rushed to the piano in the morning to play to her what had flashed across my mind during my first waking hours. She had not much knowledge of modern music, and she really could not get an idea of my composition from the loose fragments of it which I bawled and croaked in my hoarse voice to a sketchy, improvised accompaniment.

But she managed without flattery or lying not to throw a wet blanket over me with her doubts. She asked me questions about various details, about the meaning of this or that phrase or about the development of the action. And she would never warn me that it was getting late, that my pupils were waiting or even, sometimes, that the time for the end of the first lesson had

almost passed, although I knew very well that she was worried by this thoughtless light-heartedness of mine.

These working-hours in the intervals between the lessons and in the stillness of the night gave me a new strength of will, a new nature. This could be seen in my actions, my speech, my hearing, and my teaching. I was not tired or bored by anything, even when it drew me temporarily from my work and kept it back; for I myself and everything round me were filled with the new, sure happiness of growth.

Edith was afraid of my exalted mood and made anxious efforts to spare me all the cares and annoyances of everyday life; but that did not trouble me; on the contrary it filled me with tender gratitude, and I even joked about it. Her motive was to postpone as long as possible my awakening and my disillusionment; for she trembled at the thought of these.

When I sat facing Marina and telling her about my opera, I was perfectly conscious

of my love to Edith and the closeness of my union with her.

I had come alone. I had left to Edith the teaching of a few beginners. I believe I had a kind of vague fear that Marina would be hurt, and would deride our solid, middle-class order and security.

Her greeting of me was rather reserved, indeed was almost absent-minded and distrait. She seemed very much absorbed in her own affairs, and I felt inclined to go away again at once.

But everything was changed when I timidly explained my composition to her and began to play it.

Her concert tour had not met with the success that had been anticipated, and this had slightly lowered her standing at home. She was now looking round feverishly for a new, sensational part as *prima donna*, and in the pride of my complete happiness I was not very surprised to see her becoming more and more excited after she had heard a few fragments of the opera.

She concealed her excitement from me,

no doubt considering her reserve as a piece of necessary shrewdness. She only showed a cool, patronizing, friendly interest, and said she was willing to do her utmost on my behalf, provided I was ready to subordinate myself to her hints and experience.

She directed my attention particularly to a female part, which she made the centre of the whole dramatic action, and to which she tried to adapt the situations, the soli and ensemble opportunities, and even the style of the music. With convincing technical reasons she minimized the importance of all the other parts. I admired the masterly way in which she handled me and my work, as well as her exuberant ideas and her quick grasp of theatrical effects.

I knew what she was driving at, and I was not in the least disposed to allow her to influence me on essential points. Nevertheless when I left her the plan of my opera was entirely altered, and I was convinced, moreover, that my composition had thereby been considerably improved.

I had to hurry back immediately afterwards to my pupils. Some disagreeable and difficult ones were due that day, and when I came home tired to dinner, Edith gave me a full and conscientious report on the beginners she had been teaching, telling me whether they had been zealous or recalcitrant, their work good or bad. But the very sound of her words was so familiarly dear to me, so trustful and trustworthy that I had no need to listen to their meaning; I was safe on my island of bliss,

It is true I made only a slight and casual reference to my visit to Marina.

Besides, we had a great many other things to do that evening. How delightful our quiet collaboration was on these long evenings! We either wrote letters or musical scores, or I tuned the piano while she read the paper to me—or, as a special treat, a book.

We were just about to go to bed. I had risen, noticing that it was really very late. Then she touched my arm, wishing to say something to me, and I realized that she

had purposely prolonged our working hours. She spoke in a very low voice, as though she could not make up her mind to begin. Possibly she had prepared the actual words long before, and now her voice refused to serve her. She held me tight; she was no doubt weeping softly.

Then suddenly the sense of her words, although she did not repeat them, became

perfectly clear to me.

I felt her shaking convulsively. In a kind of helpless way she stroked my hair and my shoulders, and clung to me as though she had to implore my forgiveness.

Our care-free life, she said, would now be at an end. She would no longer be able to help me as much as she used to do, and then, what was going to happen later on?...

The sense of these last words was entirely lost to me, and there seemed no point in asking questions.

I took her in my arms and kissed her, and laughed.

'Is it possible, or have I guessed wrong?

We are going to have a child? It is quite absurd to be actually unhappy at such a moment. What can we do but be glad?'

'That's just it,' she said. 'At a moment when we oughtn't to be anything but glad, we have to be afraid. Everything will be much more difficult for you—the tiny apartment—no rest.'

And she clung closer to me and wept more bitterly.

Well, well, I told her, her nervous excitability was increased by her condition, but things were not at all so dismal as they seemed to her.

'We need the child to complete our happiness,' I said.

The sense of my words did not matter; what was necessary was the unconcerned tone, the convincing, natural gladness.

She had been afraid of the way in which I would receive the announcement, and she was comforted and actually happy when I seriously disapproved of her attitude and only joked about it.

Then she herself found all sorts of remorseful, self-accusing epithets to describe her sinful want of courage.

She chattered away about the hundred little preparations she would have to make and had already begun, about arranging for my lessons and for our joint work, and about the happy possibilities of the distant future.

And the evening ended with a passionate embrace, confirming anew our youthful love.

But for many a night after, when she was asleep, I slipped away to my little table where I was accustomed to work, and lit the gas-stove, for the nights were frosty.

Yet I was not thinking of work.

Was I prepared to have a child and bring it up? Was I not still too young for that? Had I not just begun to live myself? Had I not a right to think only of myself, or rather of our two selves? Was our present situation, not to speak of the future, not too insecure? Edith was delicate, and there were endless possibilities

of sickness implied in her slender powers of resistance.

I drove away these dark forebodings as ludicrous. I did not want to realize how much else there was weighing upon me.

I sought strength in the thought of Edith's joy, and of her growing impatience and longing.

And I overcame my unworthy mood or believed I had overcome it. But I realized how completely I had been under the spell of my anxious thoughts, by my excessive joy and relief, when all my fears proved to have been foolish, when the little, plaintive voice was heard in the house and Edith felt stronger and better than ever.

How stupid and wicked I had been! I was filled with humility and gratitude in the presence of a fate that cared nothing for our wishes and our plans.

A feverish desire for work took possession of me, as only once before in my life. Everything succeeded with me, everything inspired me and spurred me on. I shrank from no obstacle.

I could not say when the change came. It was not sudden; it came gradually.

It was, least of all, due to the difficulties of my work and life. For a long time I had tried not to take notice of any of these.

I found it impossible to teach at home any longer, and I had to strain every nerve to make up for the loss of time entailed by going from pupil to pupil.

This change was partly necessary on Edith's account. Her strength and increased activity during those early days had proved to be an artificially stimulated nervous tension caused by her maternal duties. She had got up too soon and overworked herself.

She did not know it, and would not admit it; but she needed all her strength of will to overcome her exhaustion and weakness.

A conjuncture of unfavourable circumstances showed how insecure was the material basis of our existence. At the half-year some of my pupils gave up their lessons, on account of other studies, or as

the result of bereavement or illness in their families. Others did not care to take lessons at their homes. Perhaps I had also rather neglected my duties at the time of my overwhelming creative activity.

And Edith, who at one time had carried on such effective propaganda for me, could no longer do so now that she was my wife.

I employed a guide only for a short time. Afterwards I deceived Edith with the pretence that I had one, but she soon guessed the truth. And now she was watchful and anxiously suspicious. I was risking my life in the street traffic every time. It was unavoidable. Yet I proved to her, in all seriousness, that it was a positive need for me, a rejuvenating tonic bath after my soul-destroying lessons. And. when I came home, I would compare the refreshing sensation after my nervous strain to the triumph of re-birth, to the feeling of a successful swimmer after a bold plunge, to the excitement of mountaineering and of other sports.

I was seized by a strange impatience. Time flew. I felt compelled to work faster, to accomplish all I possibly could, as though sinister powers would very soon

bar my way.

But I had to reject everything I created. However desperately I forced myself to begin all over again, I had to break off. Everything seemed forced and unhappy. I had no longer any confidence in my own judgment. 'Perhaps,' I began to think, 'Marina's change in the plan of my opera, however much I approved it, has estranged me from my work?'

So far as my profession was concerned I had to think of new possibilities and increased earnings, for my liabilities were mounting up. I heard of a likely position as organist that was vacant and I followed this up eagerly. But all this was done under an oppression that made it difficult for me to act or think; I had the feeling that everything was quite useless. How that crippled me!

And what a strain it was not to let Edith

notice my mood! Until then we had never dissembled to one another.

Edith made constant efforts to resume our former life. She tried sometimes during the evening or afternoon, when I was free for half an hour, to read aloud to me. But she was tired after her day's work and her disturbed nights, and became sleepy after a short time. I was tortured most when she was not thinking of what she was reading. However clearly she articulated then, I could only grasp the sense with the utmost difficulty. What agony it was for me, when her speech grew indistinct and her lips began to move convulsively, although she was trying with all the might of her strong, kind nature to master her sleepiness!

And how we both shrank from embracing one another, and invented all sorts of excuses for avoiding this without hurting each other's feelings!

But I would not allow myself to be stifled by this intangible mist of fears and cares. What was it after all that oppressed us when we put it into words? I tried to think of other marriages made unhappy through hatred and deceit. I reminded myself over and over again of the rare, confident joy in our love and harmony.

It was no doubt unavoidable, and there was no use my trying to deceive myself, but

I was becoming a mere machine.

After the unbearable piano-strumming and the inevitable and incurable mistakes of my pupils, no longing for new tone-pictures, no flights of imagination were possible for my bruised and beaten brain. If in wakening in the morning, enchanting new harmonies and cadences hovered before me like precious, heavenly hopes—only a veil, a thin curtain of mist needed to be raised—I knew that the hackneyed and wrongly played exercises of my pupils would smother and crush them.

How had the thing happened? At one time I carried a similar load of work quite easily; I needed little sleep and I was full of resilient energy, and now I was tired, hurried, tortured, and pursued waking or

sleeping by phantoms of increasing toil. I seemed to be constantly fleeing from something. What had changed me? What had happened to me?

Though Edith was distressed at not being able to devote herself any longer to me, she regarded this as inevitable, as a later phase of life, in which the youth and the lover had to grow into the man and the father. Thus, she believed, it had been ordained by God.

Besides, she hoped that by the time the child grew older, things would be improved.

It is not difficult to imagine how that illusion came to an untimely end. It was impossible to conceive how Edith would be able to manage the load of work that a second child would entail. The strain of one child had been much too great for her health, owing to her unselfish conscientiousness and unscrupulousness. Yet she was glad at the possibility of having a son. How brave, how fine her joy was!

I consulted our doctor about the matter.

My ignorance and hesitation must have seemed very laughable to him. But he carried on the conversation with the unembarrassed coolness of a man of the world. With very little display of learning he assured me from professional knowledge, based on experience and reliable statistics, that the operation would be perfectly safe.

However, Edith, despite her clear-sighted appreciation of reality, remained obdurate to all reasoning. She became very excited and put her hand on my mouth when I ventured to make the suggestion.

'If we intend to live,' I said, 'it is our

duty.'

'Then rather die,' she whispered; and I felt how her body trembled as she leaned against my chair. She stood behind me, so as not to have to look at me. 'We must not poison everything with our cleverness,' she said. 'Perhaps we may mar our happiness and hinder our salvation in a distant future! Playing at Providence must have its limits.'

What was there to say in reply? She was right, if fate had ordered things wisely. But had it?

Little Gitta was several months old; she could already say a few words. Her weight was astonishing and she laughed—that was the most surprising wonder—she laughed in ringing peals that could be heard all over the house.

This laughter was a means of understanding between Gitta and myself. Every day a little dialogue in pantomime took place between us, like an act of morning devotion. I had only to approach her and she would roll with an entreating gurgle to the edge of the bed, and often far into the net. There she lay motionless, and I felt the little mite's eyes resting expectantly on me, as if I were the greatest actor of the day. By varying grimaces and artfully twisted hands and feet, I earned her unbounded shouts of happy laughter.

And that echo—the forgotten bliss of a paradise that could never be lost and could always be regained—haunted me through all the hostility and waste of the day.

Once at a street-crossing where I often had to wait until a passer-by took me with him, Milka seized my arm. I did not recognize her immediately. Her voice had taken on a sharp, strange tone.

She had come on one occasion to our lodgings, she said; but the young lady who had opened the door looked so refined that she had not summoned up courage either to say that she knew me or to tell what she wanted. What would the lady have thought?

The doctor had sent her. He considered that it ought to be a very favourable time now for finding a vacancy in the hospital, and he had said that the operation had been performed several times lately with great success.

Had Milka forgiven the affront offered her by Marina and myself? She had forgotten it, she said. Much must have happened since then.

I asked her several questions; but she was in a hurry, and could accompany me only a little way. She merely wanted to know what to report to the doctor. He was a kind fellow, she said; and wanted to help me.

She fled. It was easy to see that she was anxious to avoid my questions. I noticed a strange meaning in her obscure, confused answers when I asked her how things were going with her.

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In those days I was often impatient, unjust and hard with Edith; and in the middle of a quarrel, when I realized I was in the wrong and began to feel sorry, I would suddenly become ludicrously amorous and humble—which was infinitely worse. I do not know how that happened, unless it

was that I longed for her and yet was afraid of her. It was, no doubt, the result of my lonely, anxious nights and my laborious days.

How little sleep had once sufficed me! Now, if Gitta had been restless during the night, I absolutely needed some instrument of torture to keep me awake when I was teaching. And Gitta was often restless at night. At first this had made us anxious, but the doctor assured us that it was of no consequence at all, and was quite usual with children.

I was often loath to return home after I had given my last lesson. So I frequently went to Klitzinger's again. But I never met either the doctor or Milka there.

I was relieved by the riotous noise of the boarders, the crowd of people round me when I played the piano, and by the operetta tunes that were evoked by my fingers, and that lay so far from my real life and thoughts.

Of my former friends I met only Hapmann. Stetzer had been caught after all, and locked up. But not much had been proved against him, and he would soon be free again.

Milka's grandfather, old Pekal, had entirely lost his reason and had been removed to an asylum. Although he always slept in his coat, he had on one occasion cut open the lining of it and found papers and old lead buttons instead of his treasure. 'The doctor now sends Milka to the streets to earn money. She has been sold to him and is now a lost woman through him,' said Hapmann. 'Formerly many a man in a good position would have liked to marry her. They never come to Klitzinger's now, because they owe too much here.' He spoke these last words in a low voice, looking round him anxiously; so deeply rooted still was his fear of the doctor.

Was not that the case with me as well? Why, then, did I stay there and quiet my conscience with the thought that I should not find him there? If the operation were successful how differently I might provide

for Edith, and of how much I might relieve her!

'It is not a personal question,' I told myself, and so made up my mind to see him after all.

With a feeling of repugnance, and yet with a kind of home-sickness and curiosity, I descended the steep, uneven stairs to the basement dwelling.

Milka was cleaning her shoes and singing one of those melancholy Bohemian folksongs with their never-ending verses. She was on the point of going out.

She took refuge in a kind of scared restlessness, being probably afraid of indiscreet questions. But even when she had realized that I was much too preoccupied with my own thoughts to ask her questions, her anxiety did not vanish. She stood there rigid as stone, turned slightly away from me, patient and tormented. I wanted to be kind to her. She should not be

allowed to notice any change in our relations to one another. She perhaps longed as much as I did for a bygone, childlike innocence, and for our happy friendship.

But she did not hear what I was saying. Interrupting me hurriedly she inquired whether I had heard anything about her.

'What do you mean?' I asked in astonishment.

'Nothing particular. I only thought. . .'
Was I still part of a higher world for her
—the standard of a purer life to which my
good opinion had lifted her?

Then, all at once, with impetuous haste she threw herself upon me as if intoxicated. She kissed my coat, my arm, but not my lips. She held my hand and stroked it. How she had always admired my hand because it was so small and white!

Close to me I smelt the cheap scent which I had noticed on entering. I managed to bear with it.

She chatted away and laughed over a thousand things. She also urged me to

have confidence in the doctor. He knew what he was about. Then she asked me whether my wife was kind to me, whether I had always enough money, and whether I had to work hard. Beautiful, ladylike women, she said, cost a lot of money.

How happy she felt that I was so good and kind to her!

Suddenly she had an idea. She knew a place with a wonderful gipsy orchestra. We must go there; it was quite a different place from Klitzinger's.

I gave in to her, and she felt very proud

that I liked the place.

After that we often met there.

Amidst the noise of fiddling, chattering, and shouting she taught me how to dance. All went well if we were careful. We had only to keep to the side of the hall.

Sometimes acquaintances accosted me there—pupils or their relatives. I could not always distinguish the voices that greeted me.

Once I met Marina there. She called me to her table. It was at a late hour. She

laughed when I would not come at once and came to fetch me.

This time I understood what was due to Milka—I did not move.

Marina grew angry. She felt humiliated before her friends and hissed out some spiteful words in a low voice.

Milka was beside herself with joy. I ordered champagne and cold meat, and we made a tremendous noise. She laughed and shouted and sang. In what other way could she work off her triumph? Hers was not a joy with any hope for the future.

We walked afterwards in the cold morning air through the streets with their early traffic.

Milka now began to talk of nothing but the possibility of my being able to see. She enticed me with descriptions of the power of sight which I could not imagine for myself, and she revived the enigma which had puzzled me so often in my youth—the mystic link that, without the need of touch, connects human beings with objects both near and distant. She stirred me up, never for a moment relaxing her efforts. It was as though she could only justify her conduct that night by persuading me to take the step for which, curiously enough, my courage failed me.

She led me to the hospital. I was not thinking where we were going. It was not until I noticed the hospital smell at the gate that I stopped.

'Yes, yes,' I said; 'I agree, but I must

first tell them at home.'

She saw the necessity of this. 'But when are you going to come?' she asked.

'This very day.'

Then she would let the doctor know, she called after me.

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I wandered through the streets. It was too early yet to go home. I should frighten Edith if I opened the passage door at this hour. Perhaps she had not looked at my bed, and did not know yet that I had been away for the night.

Why did I fear the operation? What

did I risk? At the Institution a pupil had been so disfigured by an unsuccessful operation that people could not bear to look at him when they spoke to him. Did I care then so much about my looks? Why did I tremble at the thought of disfigurement? Edith did not trouble her head about appearances.

I had chosen the streets with least traffic, but I hardly knew where I was going. I came to the river, and heard the rushing of the weir. The wooden planks of the old bridge sounded hollow beneath my feet and seemed to sway. What a tempting thought it was to sink down into this rushing water and disappear!

It would go on rushing to all eternity, away over everything. All would be at an end!

What madness was coming over me? Why did I hate myself? Why did I wish to be so far away from myself?

I was still feeling disgust at the clamminess of Milka's hands with their callous smoothness from which my grip slid away.

I was longing for Edith. How had it happened that I was so very far away from her? Last night in the dance hall I had paid the bill with our next quarter's rent. And I had forfeited Marina's friendship as well.

Where was I drifting? What was the real truth that lay in my deepest soul? And why was I allowing myself to be compelled to do a thing simply through weakness or consideration for others? Would it not be well to define once and for all what was due to others and to myself?

How easy Edith found it to make a hundred sacrifices all day long, and to live for others alone. She existed solely for me and her child! Were we to have no life of our own? I did not intend to surrender myself like a lifeless corpse, with no desire or existence of my own, and with no further use for my physical faculties. Was my child, this second life that had issued from myself and made a new beginning, a substitute for my own life?

And what did I want for myself?

Was it vanity or thirst of fame that drew me so strongly to my work and filled me with such love for my opera—that phantom, that fiction of the brain, that thing that was nothing? Why did I realise so acutely that it separated me from Edith?

Could it be that all this time I had been merely stifling my longing for Marina? Was that, perhaps, the reason? Did I think I had only to become a great man and Marina would be mine? Did she hover above everything that I was straining with all my powers to reach?

Edith was the dream—the ideal sister or mother.

That was why I sometimes resisted so desperately when in my lonely, anxious nights the beauty of her body that I knew so well haunted me like an enchanting vision. I could only be pure and happy beside her when, without desiring her, I recognized her feelings as my own.

Since the child came she had been only the mother. It was always an effort for her to follow my thoughts when I came to her with an overflowing heart. I had none to whom I could read or play. She had no longer any faith in my future or my work. How paralysing that was! She was turning me into a puny, work-worn creature, into a money-earning machine.

I was standing on the bridge. The passers-by pushed against me. Now I knew. I had known it before in my inmost self, and had merely tried to ignore it, because the dangers and sufferings of my life's true road had frightened me. Marina meant a larger life, a life commensurate with my gifts and my nature. She was difficult to attain; perhaps she was altogether unattainable for me. That was the reason I had thought myself happy with Edith, who had been accessible to me.

I had to make certain of this. My life was not to rest on self-deception.

I had long avoided Marina, for my conscience troubled me. My work lay like lifeless rubbish, courage and desire had ebbed away, but she still kept urging me on. I had promised her to complete my opera by next season.

I called to a boy who was passing by whistling, and asked him to get a taxi for me. At that hour Marina would certainly be still at home.

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She was still in bed. I brooked no refusal, and forced my way in. The maid probably thought I had gone mad.

I had forgotten to invent a pretext for calling.

Marina laughed when I stood before her, not knowing for a moment what to say. Perhaps she had already forgotten the incident at the café.

'You rarely come to see me now, and when you do it is at a most improper time,' she said maliciously. How mildly I was being punished! 'You are pardoned if it is joy that has kept you from sleeping. I suppose *Miletta* is finished?'

She had already fixed on a title for the opera! There was an efficacy in the co-operation of her will with mine that was very different from Edith's languid, forced participation.

The unknown name sounded as strange as the name of some one secretly expected . . . our child!

I implored her not to think of our opera just then, but to listen to me as though I were a stranger who had been unknown to her until that moment. Was that not almost the truth?

She was the highest and last to whom I fled, I told her. She had to be my judge, perhaps also a witness in my case!

She did not try to ridicule me. She had a knowledge of human nature, and listened to me silently.

It was not easy for her to discover what was essential in the rushing torrent of my incoherent, unsparing self-accusation, and in my timid confession of everything that concerned Edith. Now and again she

interrupted me with a question.

What had become of her irony and the impatience with which she used to interrupt me as soon as I threatened to become too personal?

She knew what I was driving at.

'I have gone astray in life,' I said, 'and life is so merciless; there are no sign-posts; one can only perish or find one's way back.'

I did not want to speak of anything but her.

But she would only talk of Edith and of my child.

'Are my feelings so unnatural? Are you horrified at me?' I said at last somewhat bitterly, groping timidly for her hands that were lying outside the coverlet.

She did not repulse me; but she said, 'You are both too sentimental; that is all. I should like to have a talk with your wife; your suggestion is not at all contrary to the laws of nature; the nobler the fruit, the fewer seeds it bears. The more the man himself is a fulfilment, the more careful must he be not to scatter his strength or

sacrifice any part of his life-work, so that he may bring new promise and possibility into the world.'

Did she not want to understand me? What was she talking about?

I threw myself on her hands, covering them with kisses, and I disclosed to her the slender hope which I intended, henceforth, to make the mainspring of my existence. Even if I could not possess her, I said, or win her entirely—even if I were only allowed to unfold my powers by her side, and breathe her atmosphere, I should reach my fullest growth.

She did not laugh. Perhaps she was scared by the feverish warmth of my hands, my lips, and my words.

That gave me courage. I must break through her intolerable composure and shrewd reasonableness and force a decision.

I threw myself upon her. I must not waken from my intoxication.

She did not push me away in horror or indignation. She only leaned back a little in indulgent astonishment. She tried to ward me off gently, but I held her tightly in my grip.

Now was the time to die—or begin a new life!

Sobbing, I kissed her neck and her breast.

Her indulgence was neither kindness nor affection. It was simply a puzzled inability to understand me. How ludicrous, she thought, it was to place such value on these things!

She recurred lightly to the talk I had interrupted.

I held her in my arms, and yet she was remote from me. She yielded her body, but it seemed to hold nothing of her.

'If only I could see you!' I said, raising my hand timidly to her face. Would I be able to reach through the mists to her image, to her soul, if I passed my hands over her features? I dared not do that; it would have repelled her.

I spoke of the doctor's insistence, and of his unalterable conviction that an operation on my eyes had a chance of success. She was quite thrilled at that, she said; she had long ago forgotten all about the matter.

I inquired about the trustworthiness of the oculist to whom she had once taken me. She was no longer sure which one it had been. No one was omniscient, she said.

The prospect filled her with genuine pleasure. 'When and where was the operation to be performed?' she asked. 'Just imagine if it were to be successful!'

It sounded almost as if she were opening up a new possibility for me, and making the success of the operation the condition for some future favour.

She undertook to inform Edith. She had a good idea, she said; she would tell Edith that the operation had already taken place, and that the doctor was satisfied. She reminded me that I had said I wanted to spare Edith the excitement and suspense. In a few days she could visit me in the hospital.

It was an immense hospital with a whole series of buildings. I lay in a remote part in a huge ward with a large number of beds.

My bed was in a corner. My nearest neighbour was a journalist, an unsuccessful poet, I believe, though I could not be sure of that, or indeed of anything else about him. Everything he said about himself was so extravagant and witty that one could never be certain of the truth of his statements.

The doctor had told him to entertain me, as I had to lie still. After the operation that was the most important thing. But to remain quiet and motionless day and night, without being actually ill, was not good for my thoughts.

I do not know whether it was my thoughts or the operation that caused the fever. It showed itself in constant, excited disputes with my neighbour.

Edith did not come. My impatience and anxiety were very detrimental to my condition.

My neighbour, it seemed to me, could not grasp the simplest thing in the world. I explained to him that one loved a woman all the more if one did not restrict one's love to her alone. One would be more just towards her, not demanding the impossible from her, nor looking for perfection in her, but just loving her for what she was. He asked whether women were of the same opinion. Whereupon I flew into a rage; for that was the nuisance—women never understood.

Then he roused me by advancing some theoretical considerations which, as he maintained, confirmed my views. More especially he tried to please me by praising polygamy as advocated by an ancient Greek philosopher—the mother for the house and children, the concubine for love, the slave for daily use. 'And you see,' he said, 'we demand all this from one woman, and when we discover that we are expecting too much from her, we begin to hate and despise all the others.'

I have to bless him for taking the trouble

for putting it all so clearly and divertingly. By agreeing with me he showed me my mistake as if in a mirror.

Edith did not come to see me. The days went by. I could not understand it. Marina had sent me word that all was well at home.

What had Marina told her? She had written to me that Edith was not very much upset even by the news of the operation, and that regarding the other matter also she was much more reasonable than I had represented. She had proved to be perfectly amenable to common sense.

What did that mean? I had not asked Marina to speak to Edith about that proposal. No, no; I could swear that. What I had said that day had been meant for Marina alone.

I did not dare to send for Edith now. I had to wait. I asked for Marina.

Marina never entered an hospital. That was one of her principles. Besides, she was so very busy with rehearsals! She sent her maid with a letter. It contained good

news. The organist's post I had applied for was practically assured for me, and my criticisms of some concerts which she had once asked me to write had met with great approval; the editors were thinking of engaging me permanently as musical critic.

The doctor reported telephone conversations which he had had with Edith, who, he said, was merely kept at home with a cold. But he did not know Edith, and therefore invented her answers very badly.

Marina knew how to get others to do as she wanted, and how to put everything in such a way that it effected its purpose.

So very likely she had represented my proposal to Edith as my wish and message.

What had been happening while I was disputing here with my neighbour? Was everything over, perhaps, without my being told?

I imagined Edith on her way to the doctor—was he a doctor? I heard the low, husky laugh of our family physician

as he said: 'To-day the removal of such a web of cells without the patient's knowledge is no longer any problem. Of course, I myself do not undertake such operations.'

I pictured Edith lying ill and lonely in a strange room, and heard Gitta crying alone in our empty, locked-up flat.

Why was I lying here? It was senseless. I tried to wrench the bandage off my eyes. The nurse flew to me and caught hold of my hand. I fought desperately. 'Let me go! Let me go!' I cried. I was not going to stay there any longer, I said. I did not believe a word the doctor said. I did not need to see. Everything had been perfectly all right and just as it should be. Let them only set me free!

It was this struggle, they say, that caused the failure of the operation.

At least so the doctor asserted. And he declared that the disappointment hit him almost as hard as it did me. It was his first operation, he said. A successful result—and of that he had felt quite certain—during the specialist's absence, would have

meant his securing the post of assistant, for which there was another and less gifted man in view. He had to describe his own circumstances to me in order to justify his daring attempt. His people at home were poor, he said, and they had sacrificed their last penny for his training.

Milka had been my only other visitor. The doctor had as yet not told her of the result of the operation. She had been so proud of having persuaded me to undergo it.

'One must be of some use,' she said modestly.

At last the day came when I was allowed to leave the hospital. The doctor took me home. We met Milka at the door. She broke into a violent fit of weeping when she saw me. The little white spot she saw in my eyes could not have been the only reason for her tears; she must also have seen my pale, agitated looks.

She did not allow the doctor to go into the house. So it was for that, she said to him, she had given her help! It was for that she had been persuaded by him. She had had enough of him. She would never forgive him; everything was now at an end between them!

The doctor laughed at the threat, but his laugh did not sound very cheerful.

Hesitatingly and apprehensively I turned the key in my door.

The place was silent. No one came to meet me.

I went through the kitchen and entered the sitting-room. There was not a sound! There was only the din of the street traffic outside.

Had I forfeited my right to find life here?

I found Edith asleep, half crouched on the mat beside Gitta's bed. I sat quite still until she should awake.

Nothing at all that I had feared had happened.

Edith had simply not been able to make

up her mind to follow Marina's advice, and had been afraid that I should be incensed at her. She had therefore not had the courage to visit me. She had postponed her visit from day to day. Shyly and timidly she said at last . . . she found it difficult to put it into words . . . that there was after all another means of securing a free future for me and restoring me to my art. We could have a separation. She had found a post that she could fill, and that would keep her and the children.

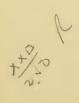
I deserved a far heavier punishment. But the mere idea that she might be in earnest was so cruel a shock that it roused me from my fool's paradise. I awoke to tangible, matter-of-fact realities, and drove away the last shreds of that evil mist with a laugh.

How fine it is, I thought, to surrender one's own individuality like some outlandish ware that has found an appropriate purchaser.

And I was very proud of my humility. But I had not renounced myself at all. The happiness and growth, that I needed and desired, remained well within the settled limits, beyond which I alone could point the way.

And so this period of my life closed with a very simple revelation. I had been lonely from my childhood onwards, and therefore, with hungry heart, I had only wanted to receive, and had never learned that love means sacrifice. PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
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